

2013 WHITE HOUSE CEREMONY

Speakers: Susan Hildreth, Michelle Obama

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>> SUSAN HILDRETH: Today we recognize the extraordinary work of ten outstanding museums and libraries from across the nation and celebrate the valuable role these institutions and all museums and libraries play in our communities.

The National Medal for Museum and Library Service is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums. The ten institutions that we recognize today show us what is possible. They are places that are using their physical and digital spaces, their collections, and their dedicated staff to make a real difference in community life.

This year's winners represent the best of our nation's libraries and museums. There are countless stories across the country of Americans young and old, learning, enjoying, and opening doors to new and deeply powerful experiences at their local museum or library.

And now it is my distinct pleasure and deep honor to introduce Mrs. Michelle Obama, the First Lady of the United States.

>> MICHELLE OBAMA: Thank you all. How is everyone? Good afternoon. Please sit. Welcome to the White House. I love saying that.

I am thrilled that all of you could be here today as we honor these ten outstanding libraries and museums. I want to start of course by thanking Susan. Where did you go that quickly? There you go. For that very kind introduction but more importantly, for her outstanding work on behalf of our country and our nation's museums and libraries.

As Susan told me in the back room, these are her peeps. So she is doing a phenomenal job. And of course I want to recognize our guest of honor today, this year's medal winning libraries

and museums. Thank you all for your outstanding contributions to communities and to our country. Every day you all are pushing boundaries, defying expectations, and redefining what it means to be a library and a museum in this country.

You're not just exposing our young people to science and the arts. You are actually putting instruments and paintbrushes and computers into their hands and helping them blossom into museums and artists and scientists themselves.

You're not just helping kids check out books. You're actually teaching them to read those books. You're tutoring our kids who have fallen behind in a grade level. You're teaching English as a second language. You're developing the next generation of lifelong learners. And I also understand that there are some of you who are even members of our Let's Move Museums and Gardens Initiative. Yes, indeed.

And you know that I greatly appreciate that work, everything that you all are doing to make it fun and creative for kids to develop lifelong health habits. Thank you for that work.

So when I think about what you all do, I think it is best summed up by a phrase in the 1920 Annual Report of one of today's honorees, the Boston Children's Museum. The report stated that, "The goal of this museum is to make better citizens." To make better citizens and more than anything else, that is what all of you do. You help create better citizens. You help people across this country become more informed, engaged in our communities.

You teach our young people about our history and you inspire them to play a role in shaping our future. And I know this work isn't easy, not at all. I know that many of our libraries and museums are dealing with tight budgets and juggling more and more demands with fewer resources.

But instead of scaling back your missions, you all are expanding them. You are reaching out to underserved populations, taking on issues like poverty and illiteracy. You're partnering with schools and community organizations, finding new ways to share your resources as widely as possible.

Take the Public Library of Cincinnati in Hamilton County for example. They ran a summer lunch program serving sixty-seven hundred meals to hungry children. And all of you are embracing the magnificent diversity of the communities that you serve,

making sure that everyone no matter where they're from or what language they speak, can enjoy all that you have to offer.

And that is precisely why we - what we try to do here at the White House. As you know, this house in many ways is a museum and we have worked so hard to open up this place to as many of our young people as possible, doing everything from hosting workshops on poetry to having modern dance. Yes, the Alvin Alley Dancers danced right here. Then the curators realized that some of those leaps were threatening the chandeliers. I don't think they thought that through. So they were wincing as the leaps were happening.

But we've also hosted jazz, classical, and country music workshops here for young people because like all of you, we want our young people to know about and be proud of this nation's rich cultural heritage. And we want them so desperately to discover their own gifts and to fulfil their own potential and start thinking about their own contributions to our great American story.

Your libraries and museums are such a crucial part of that vitally important work. And Barak and I, we are truly proud of everything you do and it is a real joy and an honor for us to host all of you here.

We can't say thank you enough but hopefully you know, today is one small way to remind you that the work that you do is so critical. It is important. It is valued and we hope you all keep doing what you do every single day.

As I tell all of our teachers and folks out there doing the hard work, please don't get tired. We need you. So congratulations again on this tremendous achievement and now it is my pleasure to present the medals to today's honorees. Thank you so much.

>> MALE SPEAKER: Carole Charnow and Tayquan Pomare-Taylor.

Carole Charnow is President and CEO and community member Tayquan Pomare-Taylor, accepting the award for Boston Children's Museum of Boston, Massachusetts.

In 2011, as a newly minted teen ambassador, fourteen year old Tayquan had a special purpose, playing with younger children and engaging families at the museum and in his neighborhood.

The Teen Ambassador Employment Program at the museum, with its emphasis on transformative education and the power of play, sparked Tayquan's love of learning, helping him raise his GPA from .7 to 3.5.

He is now sixteen and preparing to apply to college. Tayquan says, "It felt like the Boston Children's Museum was made for me. And the way kids react to me at the museum, asking for me by name, learning from me shows that I have something to give."

Nannette Maciejunes and Jeffrey Tucker accepting the award for the Columbus Museum of Art of Columbus, Ohio.

Jeffrey was a self-proclaimed master of disaster. When he joined Columbus Museum of Art's Art Lab as a high school junior, he knew very little about technology and even less about art, but through Art Lab, Jeffrey's eyes were opened and he found his creativity. For his video project, Jeffrey interviewed museum visitors and peers about their emotional connections to art.

Today, Jeffrey is a media and communications major at Columbus State Community College. Now he mentors the museum Art Lab students. Jeffrey says, "The Columbus Museum of Art taught me to take risks. Their programs molded me into a videographer and I dream of someday receiving an Oscar."

Shelley Ritter and Travis Calvin - jumped the gun. Accepting the award for the Delta Blues Museum of Clarksdale, Mississippi, Shelley Ritter and Travis Calvin.

Travis Calvin's mom wanted her children to be involved in safe and positive activities after school so she enrolled them in the Delta Blues Museum's Arts and Education Program. The program became much more than a safe refuge for her family. Through classes at the museum, eight year old Travis was inspired to master the guitar and the blues. Now he helps other children discover and enjoy the truly American art form.

He will graduate from Delta State University next month with a degree in music industry studies. Travis says, "I wouldn't be where I am today without pursuing my current career path had I not signed up for the museum's Arts and Education Programs fifteen years ago. If things go as planned, I will feel the museum's influence every day of my life."

Now Joe Adams and Kate Upton. Accepting the award for the Discovery Science Center of Santa Ana, California, Joe Adams and Kate Upton.

A critical part of Discovery Science Center's mission is to inspire the next generation of science innovators. For twenty-three-year-old Kate Upton, the museum did just that. Kate's visit to the Discovery Center began nearly two decades ago. In second grade when asked about what she wanted to be when she grew up, Kate replied, "A good and faithful scientist."

Kate is on track. A bachelor's of science in chemistry and minor in math and physics are already under her belt. She is currently pursuing a PhD at California Institute of Technology.

Kate says, "During my childhood the Discovery Science Center helped to cultivate my passion for science, keeping it fun, interesting, and relevant to my life, and it taught me how to share the passion with others."

Sarah Rosenblum and Veronica Guevara. Accepting the award for the Marshalltown Public Library of Marshalltown, Iowa are Sarah Rosenblum and Veronica Guevara.

Marshalltown Public Library was an important resource for first generation American Veronica Guevara. In first grade, she found reading difficult because English was not her first language, but she became a true book worm thanks in large part to the library.

As Veronica got older, she worked with the museum staff members to identify internship opportunities and to apply for college scholarships. When she graduates from the University of Iowa this December, she will be the first in her family with a college degree.

Veronica says, "The library helped me grow and develop while honing my bilingualism when I was a little girl. It helped me discover the beauty of endless possibilities at a young age which have in turn led me to believe in the possibilities of my goals and my dreams."

Gail Naughton. Bob Schaffer. Accepting the award for the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library of Cedar Rapids, Iowa are Gail Naughton and Bob Schaffer.

For local business owner Bob Schaffer, the Cedar Rapids flood of 2008 was devastation. Czech Cottage, a gift and jewelry store Bob opened with his parents in 1975 was destroyed, precious imported goods simply ruined.

Once the water receded, Bob began to assess the damage and day after day he filled FEMA dumpsters with his family's pride and joy. He credits the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library's commitment to rebuilding in the original Czech Village as a driving force in his family's decision to rebuild and reopen it too.

He says, "If the museum had chosen an alternate location, I knew the Czech Village would at best only recover as a ghost of its former self and the future of our Czech import shop would be in question. The day the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library announced plans to rebuild in our neighborhood was a day of tremendous relief."

Neel Parikh and Jo Cruz. Accepting the award for the Pierce County Library System of Tacoma, Washington are Neel Parikh and Jo Cruz.

Spanaway resident Jo Cruz took her young children on frequent trips to the library. Picture book browsing and story time have evolved into sophisticated research as her son prepares to graduate high school this spring.

Jo's parenting experience convinced her that a foundation in literacy is essential to prepare children for success. Now as a childcare professional, Jo is using the library to support early literacy activities for the children in her care.

The library is a major resource for Joe, providing idea kit materials and even hosting block parties and group meetings for childcare professionals.

Jo says, "Families, childcare professionals, and our Pierce County Library System are team players in this community. It is reassuring to know that the success of our children is supported by passionate people concerned about the future of our little ones."

Kimber Fender and Amina Tuki. Accepting the award for the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County of Cincinnati are Kimber Fender and Amina Tuki.

From a small village in Ethiopia without running water or electricity, Amina came to Cincinnati as a refugee with her husband in the early 1990s. Unable to read her native language, learning English was a monumental challenge. Amina first stepped into the library to meet a tutor from the YWCA to work on her English.

Since that time, she has taken many more steps to further her language and communication skills. To help her daughter Hannah with her homework, Amina uses the library's Homework Central, and when the Adult Learning Center opened in 2011, Amina herself participated in classes to work on her English skills.

Amina says, "One day I picked up a small book given by a library - by the library called Coming to America. It took me all day but I made my way through the pages filled with words describing the challenges and the joys of coming to a new country. I took it home and told my husband and two daughters I would read them a story and I did. My oldest daughter cried when I finished."

Robert Karatsu and Christine DeVries. Accepting the award for Rancho Cucamonga Public Library of Rancho Cucamonga, California are Robert Karatsu and Christine DeVries.

Christine is a mom and because of a decision to home school, a teacher extraordinaire to the family's nine year old triplets. The library has been an integral part of the family's life since the triplets were tiny one-year-olds.

The library's children's programs marked development and growth from toddler story times to early elementary after school activities and now the preteen Discovery Club.

Christine says, "Through the library we have found a social network of other home schoolers. We coordinate play dates with friends we've made at the library. I can honestly say that the triplets love to read. The triplets love to learn. The triplets love to explore new worlds and the triplets love the Rancho Cucamonga Public Library."

Richard Lee and Diana Alvey. Accepting the award for the Waukegan Public Library of Waukegan, Illinois, Richard Lee and Diana Alvey.

Diana's family came to the United States from Mexico when she was only three years old. No one in her family spoke English but

shortly after arriving, Diana's mother began English classes as a way to help them adjust to their new home.

As an adult, Diana volunteers her time at the Waukegan Public Library as an ESL tutor to help others on their language journey. Diana also volunteers as a Promotora or ambassador, telling the Latino community about library free resources and programs.

She has helped ESL students to pursue job promotions, attend parent/teacher conferences at school, and describe symptoms to their doctors. Diana says, " A young mother was at home when she heard her children yelling 'fire.' Because of her participation in the library's ESL program, she knew what the English word meant and how to call 911 for help. Our programs are making a world of difference."

>> MICHELLE OBAMA: Well that concludes our awards. I hope we all leave here inspired and rededicated because as we can see from the stories that we've heard, that your work is really powerful and it is impactful and it can change lives.

You do it quietly. You do it without much fanfare or you don't require a lot of attention. So hopefully today gives you that little bit of light you need to just keep going because this country needs you. We need the work that you do and it is just our hope that every community in this country can have the resources that you are providing to your communities. That should be our goal.

And with that I think now it's time to have a little fun as my husband always says. We've got a little reception over there. We have some nice food here at the White House. They know how to throw a nice party so I encourage you to enjoy, partake, walk around, eat, have some cookies. We'll put Let's Move on hold for just a couple of cookies.

So enjoy your time. You have earned it. We are grateful. Congratulations again. Thank you so much.