

2015 National Medal for Museum and Library Service Ceremony

Speakers: Maura Marx, Michelle Obama, Announcer

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>> MAURA MARX: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 2015 National Medal for Museum and Library Service award ceremony. We are so thrilled to be here with you here today. We are recognizing the extraordinary work of ten outstanding museums and libraries and celebrating the valuable role that these institutions and all museums and libraries play in community life across the country.

These great American community anchors now join the ranks of 142 previous National Medal award winners who have over the past 21 years been recognized with our nation's highest honor for libraries and museums. The ten institutions we recognize today show us what is possible. They are using their physical and digital spaces, their collections, and their dedicated staffs to make a real difference in community life. We are so proud of them and we are proud to be here with them.

We are also very proud to be here with our Board. Several members of the National Museum and Library Services Board are here with us and I'm going to ask them now to stand.

Applause

You got to thanking them even before I got there, which is wonderful. Our Board members bring passion and leadership to the Institute of Museum and Library Services mission and they help strengthen the educational and cultural life of our country. They also lend their expertise to the National Medal selection process with their careful review of nominations and their insightful recommendations. So, Board members, we do thank you and we appreciate your dedication.

Wise advisers are so important to the success of any organization, which is why our medalists have also asked their Board members to join them here today. And I would like to ask those Board members to now rise.

Applause

Thank you for your service.

Of course, our communities are made stronger by the public officials who work every day on behalf of their constituents to make their communities stronger. I think we have Representative Ann Kirkpatrick with us here today. There she is.

Applause

And now I would like to mention our partner StoryCorps which is a national nonprofit that is dedicated to recording, preserving, and sharing great American stories. They will now visit each winning institution to document different stories from the community. They've done this since 2010 and they've conducted more than 1,000 National Medal interviews in communities across the country, all of which are preserved at the Library of Congress, Center for American Folklife.

Finally, we are most grateful for the support of history and are happy the Chief Historian and Senior Vice President Libby O'Connell - Libby is not joining us today. In any case, history has been extremely supportive of the National Medal since 2007. They've produced terrific videos like the one that you saw earlier today.

This year's winners represent the best of our nation's libraries and museums. Every single day there are countless stories across the country of people young and old learning, enjoying, and opening new doors to meaningful, deep experiences in our libraries and museums. So let's just give them all another round of applause.

Applause

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

Applause

>> MICHELLE OBAMA: Good morning, everyone. Please rest yourselves. Welcome. Welcome to the White House. Yeah, we're in the White House. It's all good.

We're thrilled to have you here today as we honor the winners of the 2015 National Medal for Museum and Library Sciences. I want to start by thanking Maura for that wonderful introduction, but for her leadership at the institute, all the work you've done. It's been terrific. I know that last month you helped the President launch exciting new initiatives to ensure that every student in this country has a library card. Go figure.

Applause

It's good stuff. But also to provide every student with free ebooks to millions of low income students. So, terrific work. Thank you. We're so grateful for the work that you've done. So, keep it up. Keep it up.

I also want to recognize Representative Kirkpatrick who I heard was here. Where? Oh, there you are. How are you? It's wonderful to have you here. Thanks so much.

Applause

And, of course, most of all I want to congratulate all of our awardees. With your innovative programming, technological savvy, enthusiastic engagements with your communities, you all are truly setting the standard for libraries and museums all across this country. And I know that you don't always get the recognition that you deserve for the important work that you do, which is why this event is so important, why I make it a point to be here every single year.

I know that some folks may view our libraries and museums as extras, luxuries, not necessities, as places we should invest in after we've achieved all of our other goals, things like creating jobs or educating our kids or making sure our families live healthy lives. But we all know better than that, right? We know that so often our libraries and museums are doing the critical work to help us achieve those goals in the first place. We can't get to our goals without the work that you all do on the ground.

The institutions that we are honoring here today are at the heart of so many of our communities, engaging in some of the most urgent issues of our time. And in just a moment, you're going to learn more about the amazing work that today's honorees do. And I want to congratulate the Board on another wonderful year of selections, the diversity, the depth, the breadth. You guys did it again.

Our honorees are doing everything from preparing young people for college, helping entrepreneurs build their businesses, supporting veterans as they transition from military to civilian life, to providing financial literacy and nutrition workshops for parents. And whether you are bringing virtual classes in STEM education to remote areas and inner city communities or teaching our children about their Native American and African American heritage, so many of you are working to close the heartbreaking opportunity gaps that limit the horizons of too many people in this country. Trust me; I know that this work isn't easy. I know that you're always strapped for time and money, always scrambling to meet those fundraising goals and those grant applications. We can get an amen on that.

But the services that you all provide are not luxuries, just the opposite. Every day your institutions are keeping so many folks in this country from falling through the cracks. In many communities, our libraries and museums are the places that help young people dream bigger and reach higher for their futures, the places that help new immigrants learn English and apply for citizenship, the places where folks can access a computer and send a job application so that they can get back to work and get back to the important process of supporting their families. So every day you all bring so much hope and so many life-changing opportunities to folks across this country.

And today I want you to know how proud I am and how grateful I am for all the work that you do. It's really good stuff. So I want to once again congratulate you. I hope this day is special. One of the reasons we do it is to make you feel as special as the work that you do around the communities. This isn't enough but it's just a small way to remind the country that we have great resources here. They are unique to this country. And it's up to all of us to support them, encourage them, to finance them, and to keep them alive and growing. So I hope you enjoy your time here. We are just proud. And we hope you keep going year after year after year. So with that, I'm going to thank you guys and we're going to get to the process of getting our awardees awarded. So let's go.

>> ANNOUNCER: Accepting the award for Amazement Square, Lynchburg, Virginia, are President and CEO, Mort Sajadian, and community member, Shirley Hunter.

Applause

>> ANNOUNCER: In 2009, Shirley Hunter, who is Assistant Pastor at Dominion Now Word Ministries, started a low cost daycare in Lynchburg. Through a partnership with Amazement Square, the daycare provides at-risk children instruction in reading, American Sign Language, Spanish language, and the arts. Pastor Shirley credits Amazement Square with helping the center equip the city's neediest children with the social and academic skills they need for a great start in kindergarten. She hopes to earn a child development associate credential and provides similar early learning daycare services to all parts of the city. She says Amazement Square helps us make positive impact in children's lives by providing an outlet that makes learning fun and gives children a different mindset about life.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Cecil County Public Library, Cecil County, Maryland, are Director Denise Davis and community member Thomas Kuzar.

Applause

Thomas Kuzar is a U.S. Army Vietnam veteran who has overcome homelessness, unemployment, and health challenges. He did this with the help of the VA Maryland Health Care System's Perry Point facility. Through the facility's partnership with Cecil County Public Library, Thomas learned computer and technology skills that enabled him to create an email account, apply for a job online, and secure a job from VA as a peer support specialist. He regularly transports groups of veterans to the same weekly address classes at Cecil County Public Library. That changed his life. Thomas says the library and the VA have a partnership that helps vets grow. Without them, I might still be in that tent in the woods with a flag on top.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Craig Public Library, Craig, Alaska, are Director Amy K. Marshall and community member Colin Rice.

Applause

Eleven-year-old Colin Rice is a homeschooled student on the remote Prince of Wales Island in Alaska. He spends much of his time at the Craig Public Library attending video conferences, reading books, and participating in gaming and coding events.

Although the library is small, Colin enjoys a wealth of resources there and attends virtual classes with professors, historians, and experts in a variety of fields. When the library purchased a 3D printer last year, Colin helped build the machine and demonstrate how it works to the community. Colin plans to continue exploring ways 3D printers can improve lives. Colin says I know this library helped instil in my mind and heart what can be done to broaden not just my horizons but those of others. When I travel, I will first look for the local library, always.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Embudo Valley Library and Community Center, Dixon, New Mexico, are Executive Director Felicity Fonseca and community member Joseph Lee Estrada.

Applause

Tenth-grade student Joseph Lee Estrada became a regular visitor to the Embudo Valley Library at age 4 when he attended children's story time and developed a love for books. He later learned how to read through the library summer program and became the library's only youth volunteer, helping librarians shelve books and assist patrons. Now Joseph volunteers as a deejay for the library's radio station. He describes the library as a second home that has helped shape his character and ignite his success in school. The library helped him rise above many of the academic challenges facing children in his largely Hispanic village and inspired him to take college courses alongside his high school curricula. Joseph says academics are the most important thing to me. Thanks to the library showing me the world in books, history lives in new ideas.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, California, are city librarian John Szabo and community member Sergio Sanchez.

Applause

Sergio Sanchez and his wife, Francisca, came to the U.S. from Veracruz, Mexico 25 years ago. They first brought their son to Los Angeles Public Library for story time as a toddler and then continued to bring him for many years. Sergio studied English and History and read the news at the library during his free time. Last year, a staff member helped him enrol in a

citizenship class at the library. And with the help of library staff and resources, Sergio passed the test and became a U.S. citizen.

Applause

He encouraged Francisca to enrol and she passed the citizenship test five months later.

Applause

Sergio is now following in Francisca's footsteps and pursuing his GED with help from the library. Their son is studying to become a chemical engineer at the university and volunteers at a library when he returns home. Sergio says, when a new family moves into the neighborhood, I tell them the most important place is the library, a place where everyone belongs and is welcome and where your dream can come true.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Louisiana Children's Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, are Chief Executive Officer Julia W. Bland and community member Kanitra Charles.

Applause

Kanitra Charles, a single mother of four, won a year-long membership to Louisiana Children's Museum and discovered that the exhibits challenged her children through play and new world experiences. She enrolled in the museum's Eat, Sleep, Play, and Word Play family programs, as well as a 20-week parenting course. The programs introduced Kanitra and her children to learning, literacy, and healthy eating concepts that changed their home life. She now prepares healthier snacks for her children instead of junk food and reads her to her family using books from the class. She feels that her experiences with Louisiana Children's Museum have helped her children acquire a love of learning and equipped her to support their development. Kanitra says my family has shared countless joyous occasions either at the museum or participating in a program of the museum, all eye-opening, fun learning experiences.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona, are President Robert Breunig and community member Jeneda Benally.

Applause

Jeneda Benally is a Navajo educator and a bassist and co-vocalist along with her brothers in a Navajo rock band. She and her family have performed traditional Dineh dances at the Museum of Northern Arizona's Annual Navajo Festival since she was a teenager. As a young person, Jeneda felt empowered by the dialogue, education, and celebration of both traditional and contemporary Navajo culture fostered by the museum. The museum contributed to Jeneda's music and dance success and helped her become an advocate for her culture and a mentor to Navajo youth. She says the Museum of Northern Arizona plays an important role in building bridges of respect for cultural diversity. I wish that all youth could have the opportunity to feel the same sense of value like I have from their local museum.

Applause

Accepting the award for the New York Hall of Science, Queens, New York, are President and CEO Margaret Honey and community member Maria Cortes Ruiz.

Applause

In 2012, Maria Cortes Ruiz moved to the United States from Bogota, Columbia and began working at the New York Hall of Science as a part of the Science Career Ladder Program. There she engaged with museum visitors, conducted science demonstrations for large audiences, and led special maker activities for visitors. After a few weeks, her interactions with the museum's guests tremendously improved her English language skills. She is now a design lab resident where she leads workshops, researches background material for educational projects and prototypes, hands on activities for museum visitors. Maria currently attends City College of New York studying chemical engineering. She says the support and the opportunities I've received working at NYSCI have made my migration to America smoother and more comfortable. It helped me expand my network and reinforce my decisions to become a chemical engineer.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, New York, are Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Director, and community member Tariq Bell.

Applause

At 10 years old, Tariq Bell joined the Schomburg Center's Junior Scholars Program where he developed a deep love of community of Harlem and a passion for social justice and education. For the next seven years, the program offered Tariq a creative space to express his activism and it helped him gain admission to Syracuse University. He earned a four-year scholarship to study history with a focus in African American studies in education, and he continued to dedicate his time raising awareness of the black art forms on campus through concerts, events, and forums. Now a dean at Democracy Prep Harlem High School, as well as an instructor in the Junior Scholars Program, Tariq reflects my experience at the Schomburg inspired me to give back and also shaped my career where I continue to raise the social, emotional, and academic awareness of our urban youth.

Applause

Accepting the award for the Tech Museum of Innovation, San Jose, California, are President Tim Ritchie and community member Maria Arias Evans.

Applause

As a principal of Washington Elementary School, Maria Arias Evans considers the nearby Tech Museum of Innovation a critical partner in serving a student body that is 95% socioeconomically disadvantaged. Students regularly take a short walk to the museum to learn about everything from electricity to physics to space exploration through hands-on activities and labs. The Tech also offers staff development for the school's teachers, STEM curriculum, and special events such as Family Math and Engineering, a free weekend bilingual program that invites parents to come learn with their children. As Maria feels the museum serves a catalyst for her students' academic success, creating a spark and the children's desire to learn. She says happy children are eager learners and every interaction our children have with the Tech Museum of Innovation is joyous. Students come back from the field trips talking about their careers as scientist and engineers.

Applause

>> MICHELLE OBAMA: Well, let's give one more round of applause to today's honorees.

Applause

You can just see from hearing the citations just the tremendous work that you all do. To all the community representatives who are here on behalf of the programs, I'm so proud of you all. Really, you are true spokespeople for your communities, for the institutions, and for this country. So I just urge you to keep doing the work. Don't get tired. That's what I whispered in many people's ears. Just don't get tired. And I can't say it enough but we're so proud. We're honored to have you here. We're grateful for all that you do. I just can't wait to see all that you continue to do in the years ahead. It's up to us to support you.

So hopefully as we shine a light on your work, there will be somebody out there that will think, ha, maybe I'll check out my library and maybe I'll write a check, maybe I'll do a little bit more in my museums. Because in the end, that's what it's going to take to keep these programs and these institutions thriving. This is just an example of ten of the organizations that are in communities all across this country. We could be here for days celebrating the institutions. We just can't do it all, so you guys are representing what's going on out there all across the country. So that concludes our program today.

Applause