



Steven Skerritt-Davis | Executive Director

Wes Moore | Governor

Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor

Harry Coker, Jr. | Secretary of Commerce

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 14, 2026

CONTACT: Alysha Suryah
alysha.suryah@maryland.gov

Governor Moore Announces Awards Recognizing Cultural Achievements of Maryland Communities

BALTIMORE, MD – Governor Wes Moore today honored several of Maryland's cultural communities with awards recognizing their achievements in the traditional arts. Awards highlighted the state's Persian, Indigenous, Cambodian, Indian, and Chesapeake Bay maritime cultures, reflecting the vibrancy of a state that consistently ranks among the most diverse in the nation.

"We are continuing to build a Maryland where everyone can achieve success—where your starting point in life doesn't limit your end point," **said Gov. Moore**. "These awards show that Maryland is a place where all communities can thrive, and where we celebrate the diverse traditions of our people."

These honorees are winners of the Heritage Awards, an annual program administered by the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC). Heritage awardees are selected via public nomination process and must demonstrate ongoing contributions in their own communities and to the state's broader cultural landscape. Nominations may be made for culturally significant people, places, or traditions.

This year's winners are:

- Navid Bazargan of Montgomery County, a master of Persian calligraphy for more than 40 years, promotes Persian culture through teaching activities
- Mario Harley of St. Mary's County, an elder of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe serving as a key educator and tradition bearer of *wampum*, or carved shell beads
- Masady Many of Montgomery County, a longtime teacher of Cambodian traditional performing arts and current art director at the nation's first Cambodian Buddhist Temple
- Sukanya Mukherji of Montgomery County, an acclaimed performer and teacher of the Indian dance form *Odissi*, as well as the founder of the Mayur Dance School
- The Ward Brothers' workshop, a Somerset County site where brothers Lem and Steve Ward brought Maryland's wildfowl decoy carving tradition to international prominence

- The tradition of Chesapeake Bay sailing log canoe racing, observed in Talbot County during a summer regatta series, is rooted in friendly competitions among watermen

“These awardees create spaces where people can come together to reflect on a shared history and identity,” **said MSAC Executive Director Steven Skerritt-Davis**. “We are proud to recognize the longstanding impact of these winners who carry their traditions forward with care, skill, and passion.”

Heritage Awardees receive a \$10,000 grant, a Governor’s citation, and photo or [video content](#) illustrating their traditions in action. MSAC publishes this content as part of regular communications in the year following award announcements.

MSAC is a unit of the Maryland Department of Commerce that advances the arts by awarding grants to nonprofit organizations and individual artists. In addition to grantmaking, the MSAC also provides technical and advisory assistance statewide, ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts. For more information about the Maryland State Arts Council, go to msac.org.

###