



Heritage Awards 2026

AWARDEES

Person or People award category: For over 40 years, Navid Bazargan of Montgomery has been a master of Persian calligraphy, a tradition integrally connected with Persian literature, poetry, and cultural identity. Prior to emigrating to the United States, he received certification in the art form from the Iranian Calligraphers Association. He has since exhibited and continues to teach weekly classes in the tradition, helping fellow members of the Iranian diaspora sustain their cultural roots.

Person or People award category: Mario Harley (St. Mary's), an elder of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, has been a key educator and tradition bearer for over 40 years of the Indigenous Piscataway tradition of wampum. Also practiced by tribes across the Atlantic seaboard, wampum are carved shell beads with multiple uses from jewelry to commemorating histories. Through Mario's efforts and classes, Piscataway people continue to expand their relationship with this tradition.

Person or People award category: Masady Mani of Montgomery has supported Cambodian cultural arts education for over 30 years as Art Director for Maryland's Vatt Buddhikarama, the first Cambodian Buddhist Temple established in the United States. A former professor at Cambodia's Royal University of Fine Arts, she continues to teach Khmer traditional performing arts, notably Cambodian Royal Ballet, a global symbol of Khmer identity.

Person or People award category: Sukanya Mukherji of Montgomery is an internationally acclaimed dancer, choreographer, and educator in the Indian classical dance tradition Odissi. Since founding Mayur Dance School in 1993, she has become a cornerstone of Odissi in Maryland and trained nearly 600 students.

Place award category: Originally a family barbershop in 1918, Lem and his brother Steve Ward transformed the Ward Brothers' Workshop (Somerset) into their carving shop, producing hand-carved duck decoys that were both hunting tools and works of art. This small community space soon grew into a national and international point of interest. Now administered by the Crisfield Heritage Foundation, the workshop continues to serve as a community center where carvers gather to carve side by side, exchange skills, and maintain the tradition.

Tradition award category: Chesapeake Bay Sailing Log Canoe Racing (Talbot) is a 150-year-old Eastern Shore tradition that evolved from friendly competition among oyster fishermen. Today, an Upper Bay maritime community of skippers, sailors, and multigenerational crews maintain and race a fleet of historic boats, of which half predate 1910, cheered on by passionate spectators across nine regatta weekends each summer. These events are highlighted by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, an active participant in and supporter of the tradition.

PANELISTS

Raye-Valion Gillette (Worcester)
Kristin Meyer (Howard)
Michelle Puhl Price (Montgomery)
Susan Manya Tolino (Frederick)

OVERVIEW

The Heritage Awards recognize long-term achievement in the folk and traditional arts. Learn more on MSAC's [website](#).