

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Milwaukee County Historical Society Celebrates Over 500 Guests at 72nd Annual Awards Dinner

Milwaukee, WI - The Milwaukee County Historical Society proudly hosted its 72nd Annual Awards Dinner on Thursday, May 22, 2025, at the historic Pfister Hotel. With over 500 guests in attendance, the evening was a celebration of the individuals, businesses, and organizations that continue to shape, preserve, and promote Milwaukee County's rich and diverse history.

A highlight of the event was the recognition of 31 businesses and organizations celebrating milestone anniversaries - from 50 to an extraordinary 175 years of service and impact in the Milwaukee community.

Annual awards were presented to recognize outstanding contributions to Milwaukee's historical landscape and community legacy:

Donald and Donna Baumgartner received the Witness to History Award, honoring their enduring leadership and lifelong dedication to supporting and documenting Milwaukee's cultural and historical institutions. Donald Baumgartner, founder of Paper Machinery Corporation, has been a prominent figure in Milwaukee's business and philanthropic communities. The Baumgartners have made significant contributions to the arts, including an endowment to the Milwaukee Art Museum and a substantial donation toward the Milwaukee Ballet's new facility. Their philanthropy has played a pivotal role in shaping the city's cultural landscape.

Jackie Herd-Barber was presented with the Courtland R. Conlee Community Service Award, recognizing her transformative work in community building and civic leadership. A tireless advocate for education and equity, Herd-Barber has been deeply involved in Milwaukee's civic life, serving on boards such as the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and the Wellpoint Care Network. She is also a dedicated mentor for Milwaukee Public Schools students, helping guide and inspire the next generation of community leaders.

Doris Heiser received the Dan Emmer Recognition Award, which celebrates the essential work of volunteers whose behind-the-scenes efforts sustain the Historical Society's mission. Heiser's longtime commitment, generosity, and passion for local history have made her an invaluable part of the Society's success.

The Concordia 27 Project was honored with the Frederick I. Olson Historic Preservation Award for its ambitious and community-centered approach to preserving Milwaukee's historic architecture. This transformative initiative revitalized historic buildings at 801 N.

27th Street, creating a vibrant community hub that includes affordable housing, health and wellness services, workforce training, and spaces for local entrepreneurs. By integrating historic preservation with comprehensive community development, Concordia 27 stands as a model for inclusive urban revitalization.

Reynaldo Hernandez was awarded the inaugural Janice and Steven Marcus Public Art Award for his iconic 1994 mural, *Mural of Peace*. Located on the south wall of the Mercantile Lofts in Walker's Point, this 60-by-152-foot mural features powerful imagery of an eagle, a dove, and a rainbow of flags, symbolizing unity and hope. Commissioned by the nonprofit Esperanza Unida, the mural has become a beloved landmark, reflecting the aspirations and diversity of Milwaukee's South Side. Hernandez's work not only beautifies the urban landscape but also serves as a lasting testament to the power of public art in community identity.

The evening's program was expertly led by emcee Sandy Maxx, whose enthusiasm and deep-rooted connection to Milwaukee added energy and warmth to the celebration.

In addition to honoring history-makers, the event raised over \$10,000 in support of the Society's educational programming, which included a generous matching contribution from CG Schmidt. These funds will directly support programs that engage students and families in learning about Milwaukee's past.

"This evening was more than a celebration. It was a powerful reminder of the value of community, memory, and storytelling," said Ben Barbera, Executive Director of the Milwaukee County Historical Society. "As we honored those who have contributed so much to the preservation and advancement of Milwaukee's history, we also looked forward - investing in education and access so that future generations understand the city's past and their place within it. The support we received tonight reflects a shared belief that history matters, and that it belongs to all of us."

The Society extends sincere thanks to its Premier Sponsors: Milwaukee Admirals, Zurn Elkay Water Solutions, CG Schmidt, Brewers Community Foundation, Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Herd-Barber family, and Donald and Donna Baumgartner. Their generosity and commitment helped make this year's dinner an outstanding success.

About the Milwaukee County Historical Society

Founded in 1935, the Milwaukee County Historical Society is the place to learn about and celebrate Milwaukee's past. Through exhibitions, education programs, the research library, four historic sites, and special events, MCHS connects residents and visitors with the people, stories, and events that have shaped Milwaukee County. The Society preserves over one million documents and photographs and more than 75,000 artifacts.

For more information about the MCHS, please visit www.milwaukeehistory.net or follow us @MKEHistory on Facebook and Instagram.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of the Milwaukee County Historical Society and Front Room Studios.

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