

INSTITUTE of
Museum and Library
SERVICES

NATIONAL MEDAL

for Museum and
Library Service

2021 PROGRAM



THE IMLS NATIONAL MEDAL IS THE NATION'S HIGHEST HONOR FOR LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS,

a tribute to how they are making a difference
in the lives of individuals, families, and
communities around the country.

INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES

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CONTENTS

- 2 FROM THE IMLS DIRECTOR
- 4 CABELL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY, Huntington, West Virginia
- 6 HIGH DESERT MUSEUM, Bend, Oregon
- 8 HIGHWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARIES, Highwood, Illinois
- 10 MEMPHIS PUBLIC LIBRARY, Memphis, Tennessee
- 12 MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM Jackson, Mississippi
- 14 MUSEO DE ARTE DE PONCE, Ponce, Puerto Rico
- 16 2021 NATIONAL MEDAL FINALISTS
- 17 ABOUT THE NATIONAL MEDAL FOR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICE
- 17 ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES
- 17 NATIONAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES BOARD

From the IMLS DIRECTOR



While times may be difficult, America's libraries and museums are still there to connect us all. For over 25 years, the IMLS National Medal for Museum and Library has recognized museums and libraries that demonstrate significant impact in their communities.

Last year, we took a pause on the Medals to rethink the program, and two words jumped out:

COMMUNITY AND IMPACT.

Today, new forms of community are being defined by looking outward with inclusive purpose. These changing definitions are an opportunity to broaden our view of community.

Impact on people and communities in our current environment can be perceived not only in the traditional goals of lifelong learning and education, but also in new ways of digital access and capacity, ways of engaging communities, forging new forms of associating and connecting, bringing all the forces and faces of the community together.

These six Medalists performed at the highest level during the most difficult times in recent memory. With communities locking down and hundreds of thousands of Americans losing their lives, these institutions continued to be indispensable during the pandemic. Front line librarians and museum staff found new and imaginative ways to offer services in the face of unprecedented challenge.

YOU CAN HEAR THEIR IMPACT IN THE STORIES OF THOSE WHO KNOW THEM BEST:

"The Mississippi Children's Museum is constantly involving itself in the community with programs like Planting the Seeds to Read, Read Across America Day, and Robotics activities. It has been a constant beacon of light."

“The Highwood Library is much more than a library. The staff listened to our community about the needs of families to expand their programs and efficiently serve all those who seek social, academic, and didactic support.”

“This wonderful place inspires so many no matter your age. From the High Desert Museum’s youth programs to permanent and rotating exhibits to very well thought out evening programs and receptions, they continue to prove one of the most important educational resources in Central Oregon.”

“Cabell County Public Library goes above and beyond to help libraries OUTSIDE of their network. The true magic of the library is not only their major effort to level the playing field of education for all, but also sharing information and resources to help other libraries reach their maximum potential.”

“The Museo de Arte de Ponce has made a difference by coming to the community. The museum is always willing to offer more opportunities, even this year when the pandemic impacted us so much.”

“Memphis Public Library offers so many services and opportunities that many people would never get to take advantage of. The library is an enormous pillar of our society and greatly needed.”

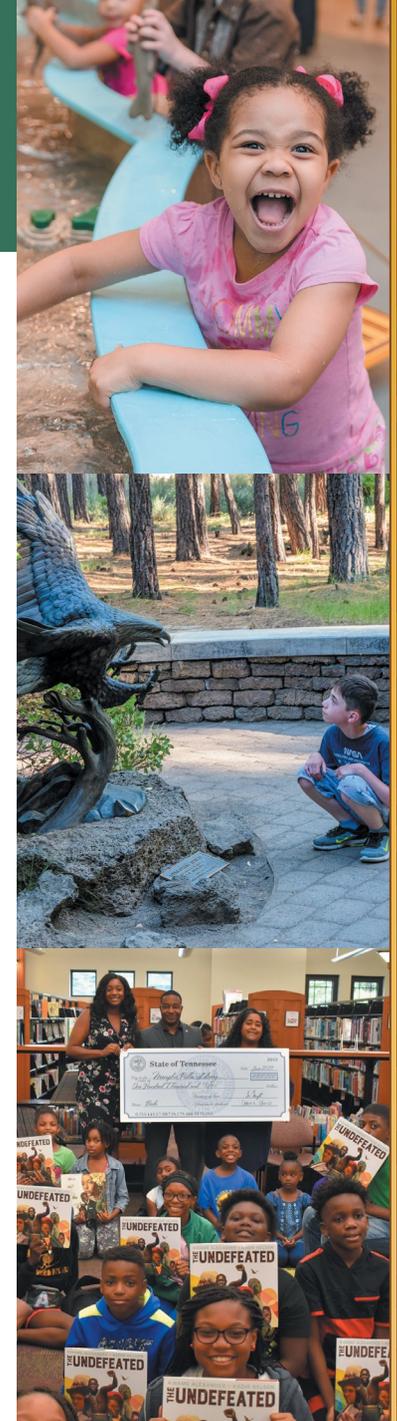
Creativity, imagination, resourcefulness, community service, and good ideas abound. Libraries and museums of all sizes and types, from all over the country, have stories of excellence that demonstrate their impact in the community. To all the library and museum professionals, volunteers, and critical partners, I want to say ‘thank you’ for your dedication to your communities during difficult times and moving into the future.

On behalf of the IMLS staff, the NMLS Board, and all our community partners, we congratulate the finalists and six recipients, including their hard-working staff and volunteers, and the communities they serve.

Thank you.



CROSBY KEMPER
 DIRECTOR
 INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES



CABELL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



Cabell County Public Library in Huntington, WV, has been serving its community for more than a century. Founded in 1902, its geographic location at the intersection of West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky is helping connect individuals in those communities with services that help meet their personal, professional, and educational needs.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Like most libraries in America, Cabell County's impact is both deep and wide. Its population of 97,000 residents uses the library in many different ways; as such, the staff develops programming that meets a range of needs and focuses on people of all ages, from kindergarteners to adult learners. Among the library's many signature activities are the "1000 Books before Kindergarten" initiative and its craft programs for all ages, offered online and in-person. It also provides free access to a tutoring service that links students who may be struggling in a particular subject to teachers who specialize in that subject.

FOSTERING INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

One element that sets Cabell County apart is its focus on information and referral services. This program's humble beginnings on 3 x 5 index cards a few decades ago has today culminated in a robust database of services available to the community—from the Red Cross to local food pantries. The library serves as the central point of both information and service coordination; for example, if a community member is having trouble paying a utility bill or finding clothes for their children, library staff can link them up with external community resources to assist. Importantly, the library walks residents through the eligibility and sign-up process for such programs.

GETTING OUTSIDE WITH A STORY WALK

In October 2020, the library worked in partnership with several local businesses to facilitate a "Story Walk" activity for families, where participants were directed to various buildings and businesses downtown to read a page from a book—which was posted inside the building window—then walk to another location to read another page, and so on. In this way, people were able to observe social distancing protocols but keep their love of reading alive.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The Barboursville location is the busiest of the library's seven branches, and its one meeting room was struggling to keep up with all the community's requests to gather there. To address this challenge, as well as the branch's extensive water damage issues, Cabell County Public Library embarked on raising critical funds to build a new library building through grants and donations. The new building will be twice the size of the current one and better able to accommodate civic meetings, children's story time, and other community offerings. It also will be the first library in West Virginia to have geo-thermal heating and cooling.



Photo Credit: Herald Dispatch

CABELL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Address: 455 Ninth Street
Huntington, WV 25701

Phone: (304) 528-5700

Web: cabell.lib.wv.us

Director: Judy K. Rule

“We see ourselves as a tri-state community, so we give free library cards to anyone in the area. Many other libraries are restricted to the taxpayers who pay for the library. We have a larger worldview.”

– JUDY RULE,
Director

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Cabell County’s Battle of the Books program—which is designed for middle school-aged children—is an annual highlight for the community. Through it, the library branches put forth teams of contestants who all read the same books, then come together to answer trivia questions about them. The series has become so popular that it needed to be split into two groups on different evenings.

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM



If you associate the Oregon landscape with rain and coasts, you are only about 50 percent right. As much as half of the state is often referred to as the dry side or the “High Desert.” The aptly named High Desert Museum is committed to interpreting this unique environment’s rich history, art, culture, and wildlife for locals and faraway visitors alike.

WILDLY EXCITING AND RESPONSIBLY TEACHING

Nestled in the forest outside of Bend, OR, is the 135-acre campus of the High Desert Museum—the only institution in the nation devoted to exploration of the High Desert. The founders of this center of cultural activity and learning established it on the premise that it takes powerful experiences for people to fall in love with a subject and learn more about it. The museum’s leadership see it as their responsibility to help visitors experience different places, times, and cultures—including the Indigenous peoples of the Plateau. With the next closest art museum being more than 120 miles away and a four-year university having come onto the scene just five years ago, the High Desert Museum has been the community’s beacon of learning for decades.

FACILITATING MOMENTS OF DISCOVERY

The museum comprises indoor and outdoor experiences, permanent exhibits, and rotating galleries that thread together art, science, history, and culture to tell unique stories. Visitors quickly make the acquaintance of the resident porcupines, which are front and center as you enter the museum. The encounter provides visitors an instant connection to nature and wildlife while also seeding a curiosity about these creatures. The museum’s exhibitions also introduce visitors to the influence of Chinese American history, Basque culture, and even buckaroo culture on this part of the country. In the iconic “Spirit of the West” exhibit, guests go back in time to visit a fur trader’s camp and navigate an underground mine.

REMAINING A CULTURAL ANCHOR

When COVID-19 made its way to the High Desert, the museum relied on limited in-person and robust virtual activities. Thanks to the strength of its partnerships and an IMLS CARES Act grant, the High Desert Museum stepped into the void of services that many in the community were facing and provided iPads and corresponding data plans to 75 families. When schools shut down and childcare became a crisis, the museum worked with a rural school in La Pine, OR, to provide comprehensive distance learning for about 20 families. Through the museum’s advocacy for rural museum funding, it also secured \$50 million from the Oregon State Legislature. These funds helped museums and arts and cultural organizations across the state weather the impact of COVID-19 on their revenues.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

While many of the museum's summer programs stand out, one of its most popular is "Raptors of the Desert Sky." Through this immersive experience, staff and visitors hike to an undeveloped part of the museum property to release eagles, hawks, vultures, and more through the forest to better observe them in their natural habitat. Guests get to see the raptors up close and observe a spectacular symphony of motion.

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

Address: 49800 S. Highway 97
Bend, OR 97702

Phone: (541) 382-4754

Web: highdesertmuseum.org

Director: Dana Whitelaw

"As we prepare to celebrate our 40th year in 2022, we are witnessing visitors who came here as children returning to share the experience with their own kids. Visitors now cut across generations, and there is wonder here for everyone."

– DANA WHITELAW, PH.D.,
Executive Director

HIGHWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY



Highwood is a community of just over 5,000 residents in Lake County, IL. Although juxtaposed between the relatively wealthy suburbs of Chicago and Milwaukee, Highwood is economically and culturally diverse. While small, Highwood Public Library responds to a range of community needs, including making their programs relevant to the diverse communities they serve.

A PLACE TO GATHER

Founded in 1976, the Highwood Public Library was literally built by its community, constructed on land donated by a resident with the then-mayor helping to lay the bricks. While always instrumental in its community, over the past two years the library has transformed to become an anchor for those who call Highwood home, providing an array of educational, social, cultural, and other opportunities. On any given Saturday, the library is where you will find a good number of Highwood families, many of whom do not have access to personal transportation. Programs range from early childhood education with Camino a la Escuela (On the Way to School) to teen services with a thriving Teen Advisory Board to the incredible Promotores (ambassador) community engagement-based program that links families to needed resources.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

The Highwood Public Library is in tune with the needs of all members of its community, including the challenges of literacy and access to high-quality education in the immigrant population. That's why the library provides academic support for students so that children can break generational poverty cycles and move on to college. For adults, the library offers a suite of literacy-focused programs available in Spanish, including Spanish GED, conversational ESL courses, citizenship classes, and more. It also works to bridge the digital divide experienced by so many families and elderly community members, offering technology support through a variety of computer programs and one-on-one tutorials. Through a program called Learning Partners, the library works with young adults to give them space and opportunity to step into leadership roles as both a student AND a teacher.

MEETING A CRISIS HEAD-ON

Many who live and work in Highwood are part of the restaurant workforce. When COVID-19 forced these institutions to close, library staff knew that its community was facing a crisis. They stepped in to connect their residents to a range of resources, including access to personal protective equipment to keep them safe in their essential services jobs and becoming a food distribution site. In March 2020, the library helped secure food for 20 families in Highwood; by December, that number had surpassed 350. More recently, the library became a vaccination site; as of mid-May 2021, more than 1,400 residents had received their COVID-19 vaccine there.



HIGHWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY

Address: 102 Highwood Ave
Highwood, IL 60040

Phone: (847) 432-5404

Web: highwoodlibrary.org

Director: Carmen Patlan

“We want to be responsive to all members of our community. If we know that some of our patrons are in survival mode, we want to provide them with the access, knowledge, and resources to help them thrive.”

– CARMEN PATLAN,
Executive Director

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The transition from middle school to high school was particularly hard during the COVID-19 pandemic. When it became clear that some students in the community weren't even registered for high school, the library and its partners were determined not to let these kids fall through the cracks. Working with the local school districts, the library staff located the children, got them enrolled, then worked with them to meet their academic needs. Today, many of these students are thriving.

MEMPHIS PUBLIC LIBRARIES



Memphis Public Libraries, or MPL, is no stranger to creating beautiful things from adverse circumstances. MPL credits its city administration and its “three-legged stool” of support: the Friends of the Library program, and its board of directors—with making MPL the special place it is. In 2021, MPL became the first-ever two-time winner of the IMLS National Medal, having previously won in 2007.

A CENTER OF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Visitors to MPL’s 18 branches encompass all ages and learning levels. MPL is much more than a place to check out books; it also helps people with job applications, assists with the citizenship process, and provides access to cultural activities. Many residents cannot afford to pay for theater or concert tickets, but in Memphis, they can go to the library for a high-quality “arts fix.” For example, MPL’s Five Fridays of Jazz attracts 500 to 600 people each week. Similarly, MPL hosts free summer camps for youth, providing a bridge for parents who want meaningful and safe summer experiences for their kids, yet cannot afford private camps. MPL even hosts an in-house FIRST robotics team, providing equitable STEM access for students. MPL pays all expenses for the team, including travel, lodging, and meals for competitions.

BRINGING SERVICES WHERE THEY ARE NEEDED MOST

MPL’s Connect Crew is a six-person mobile outreach team started in 2019 to bring educational and cultural activities into traditionally underserved neighborhoods. Some library locations have CLOUD901 or Teen Innovation Centers, which are STEAM-based learning spaces for 13- to 18-year-olds. The Connect Crew makes sought-after CLOUD901 activities—ranging from graphic design and coding to video production and sculpture—available anywhere their vans can take them. When a rare tornado ripped through Memphis in October 2019, the Connect Crew mobilized to organize and take children’s services where the devastation was greatest. While parents were dealing with government agencies to detail their losses and plan their next moves, the Connect Crew entertained the kids with MPL’s therapy dogs and other activities.

STAYING AFLOAT IN TOUGH TIMES

MPL likes to plan its services and offerings around reality. That is, they look at their community’s diverse needs—including low literacy levels—and respond accordingly. MPL analyzes what is going on and what people need in any given moment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the community’s needs were substantial. Books, computers, and Wi-Fi were needed in the short term to keep learning going, but deeper community needs were laid bare as well. MPL rallied to coordinate social programs that would keep people on their feet, including providing meals to seniors, school-age kids, and others who needed a hand.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

MPL's Cossitt Branch in downtown Memphis is adjacent to a significant population of people without housing. Cossitt Library conducts Community Conversations, where people from different socioeconomic backgrounds sit down to share a meal and build a joint vision for what services are needed. Half the spaces at the table are reserved for affluent residents and half for people experiencing homelessness.

MEMPHIS PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Address: 3030 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, TN 38111
Phone: (901) 415-2700
Web: memphislibrary.org
Director: Keenon McCloy

"Anytime our staff can exercise creativity, lean into those in need, they do it. When we had to do things differently for COVID-19, everyone pulled together and took our services to a new level."

– KEENON MCCLOY,
Director

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM



At just a decade old, the Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) is a young institution, but its impact is both deep and wide. Its diverse programming ensures that Mississippians—and visitors from across the nation—learn and appreciate the Magnolia State's cultural and physical history.

A FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

The museum was founded to advance key initiatives for children, particularly literacy and health, which are two major challenges facing Mississippi children. "Planting the Seeds to Read"—a partnership with Jackson Public Schools started in 2011—is one of the museum's hallmark literacy programs that serves not only children but their parents and caregivers, too. The program involves coordinating activities and dinner after work hours to engage the whole family. The museum's Health Gallery features a farmers market experience where children can select an assortment of colorful produce and scan items to learn fun facts about their favorite fruits and vegetables.

A SENSE OF PLACE

A key focus of the museum is teaching children about the rich history of Mississippi, as well as some of its iconic natives—from Muppets creator Jim Henson, to writer Eudora Welty, to civil rights activist Medgar Evers, and Apollo 13 engineer Gilroy Chow. To explore Mississippi's deep history and geography, the museum offers markers on a large-scale map that detail key activities in the civil rights movement in a manner that is authentic and appropriate for children. It likewise educates about Mississippi's natural environment, exploring the flora and fauna of the Plains, the Gulf Coast, the Hills, and the Mississippi Delta. An impressive feature is a series of interactive underground tunnels where children can explore the soil layers.

STEPPING UP IN HARD TIMES

In response to Jackson Public Schools' (JPS) overwhelming need for a safe and educational learning space for students due to COVID-19 school closures, MCM shifted its programming and operating priorities to create the "Launch into Learning" initiative. This initiative allowed mostly underserved students ages 5–12 to come to the museum 5 days a week to experience educational enrichment programming, outdoor play, museum exploration, and story time. "Launch into Learning" provided a much-needed childcare option for working parents, offering services to more than 100 students from 12 JPS schools. The place and space of the museum—located in the center of a park—naturally facilitates curiosity and learning. The museum's creators intentionally designed it to inspire creativity and connection to community.

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Address: 2145 Museum Boulevard
Jackson, MS 39202

Phone: (601) 981-5469

Web: mschildrensmuseum.org

President/CEO: Susan Garrard

"Our museum is fun, but it is also so much more than that. For 10 years, MCM has provided a safe, innovative space for over 1 million children, families, and community members of all backgrounds to play and learn and grow. MCM looks forward to the next 10 years of serving the children of Mississippi in imaginative ways!"

— SUSAN GARRARD,
President/CEO



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The museum created special editions of its "Playbook" publication—typically published three times a year—to address children's fears and anxiety about the pandemic. Museum staff interviewed medical personnel and first responders, as well as essential employees, to give perspective and reassurance to children during uncertain times. The typical "Playbook" circulation is 8,000 copies; however, in a great effort to provide this resource to as many children as possible, the museum provided an astounding 175,000 copies of the special editions to children across Mississippi.

MUSEO DE ARTE DE PONCE



The Museo de Arte de Ponce is a resilient and responsive community pillar recognized worldwide for its iconic mid-century building and rich panorama of Western art. The permanent collection encompasses a wide range of artworks, which provide the means to develop a diverse community outreach program, to foster curiosity and contribute to the wellbeing of its community.

A MUSEUM FOR ALL

From workshops for people without housing to programs for public housing residents to yoga for inmates, the museum is committed to connecting people with culture, with a special emphasis to procure the wellbeing of the most vulnerable. The institution has celebrated the commitment to its community not only in times of certitude, but also throughout recent crises.

LIFTING UP THE COMMUNITY

The Museo's Educational programs and activities include the initiative "Jóvenes Guías" (Young Guides), which collaborates with school art teachers to train and transform high school students into expert museum tour guides. "Puerto Rico Mio" uses art as a tool to improve the academic development of second- to sixth-grade students from La Carmen Elementary School in the Municipality of Maricao, where 85% of the students' families live under the poverty level. Additionally, "Pintando mi futuro" (Painting My Future), focused on providing a better quality of life within the communities of the public housing residents. It served more than 10,000 people who enjoyed artistic, educational, and general wellbeing events. Once the program concluded, their works were displayed in the museum.

A SYMBOL OF HOPE AND PRIDE

The museum reopened just one week after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in 2017—a vital symbol of hope when so much had been lost. After the earthquakes in January 2020, the institution again rose from adversity to inspire its community. Museum staff activated "El Museo sale a la calle" ("The Museum Goes Out to the Street"), offering art workshops in shelters, community centers, and schools that relocated in open spaces. The institution also became a center to collect basic need articles and toiletries that were distributed by the staff in the southwestern part of the island where most of the damage had occurred. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum developed a program named ConectARTE, comprising of online workshops, and cultural and educational content.



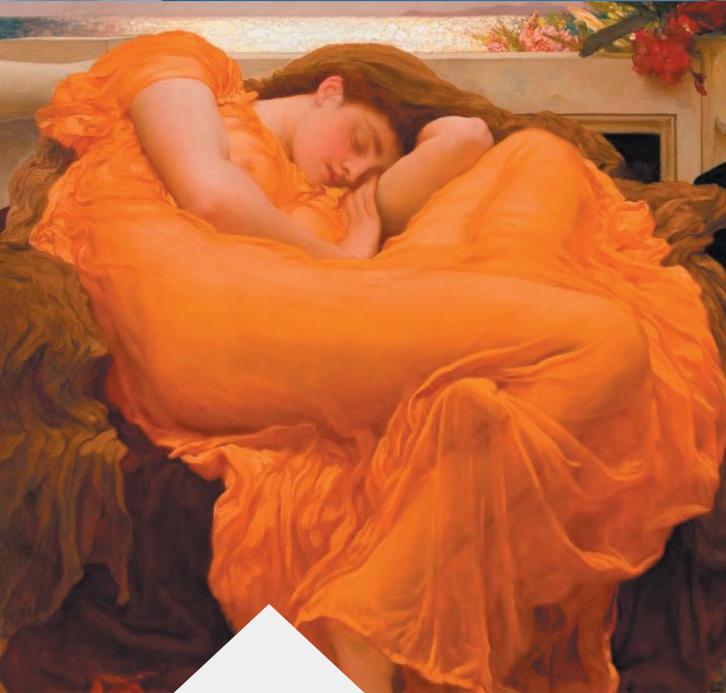
MUSEO DE ARTE DE PONCE

Address: 2325 Blvd. Luis A. Ferré Aguayo,
Ponce, PR 00717-0776

Phone: (787) 840-1510

Web: museoarteponce.org

Director: Alejandra Peña Gutiérrez



“During the past years, and especially throughout the difficult challenges that our island has had to face, we have made it our priority to work tirelessly to provide an inclusive space for self-expression, to encourage dialogue, and to restore the vigor of our community.”

– ALEJANDRA PEÑA-GUTIÉRREZ,
Executive Director

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The museum is probably best known as the home of Victorian painter Frederick Leighton’s *Flaming June*, which the people of Puerto Rico have adopted as their own. The museum has even lent this masterpiece to prestigious institutions around the world. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum decided to join the Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine (which is Dutch for “between art and quarantine”) challenge. This movement, which began on Instagram in March 2021, highlighted works of art recreated by people in isolation using common objects found at home. Many MAP followers reproduced the *Flaming June*, among other works.

NATIONAL MEDAL FINALISTS



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2021 FINALISTS

Thirty institutions were named finalists for the 2021 National Medal for Museum and Library Service. From them, this year's six winners were selected. Through the online *Share Your Story* initiative, museum and library community members highlighted ways these remarkable institutions have transformed their lives.

LIBRARIES

CABELL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY (Huntington, WV)
CHAPEL HILL PUBLIC LIBRARY (Chapel Hill, NC)
DAKOTA COUNTY LIBRARY (Eagan, MN)
GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY (Lawrenceville, GA)
HAINES BOROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY (Haines, AK)
HIGHWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY (Highwood, IL)
KENOSHA PUBLIC LIBRARY (Kenosha, WI)
LONG BRANCH FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY (Long Branch, NJ)
MARATHON PUBLIC LIBRARY (Marathon, TX)
MEMPHIS PUBLIC LIBRARIES (Memphis, TN)
NORTH LAS VEGAS LIBRARY DISTRICT (North Las Vegas, NV)
QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY, LANGSTON HUGHES (Corona, NY)
REDWOOD CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY (Redwood City, CA)
THE FERGUSON LIBRARY (Stamford, CT)
WEST WARWICK PUBLIC LIBRARY (West Warwick, RI)

MUSEUMS

ASHEVILLE ART MUSEUM (Asheville, NC)
BROOKFIELD ZOO (Brookfield, IL)
CINCINNATI ART MUSEUM (Cincinnati, OH)
CENTER OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY (COSI) (Columbus, OH)
GREAT LAKES SCIENCE CENTER (Cleveland, OH)
HIGH DESERT MUSEUM (Bend, OR)
MUSEO DE ARTE DE PONCE (Ponce, Puerto Rico)
THE MARITIME AQUARIUM AT NORWALK (Norwalk, CT)
MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM (Jackson, MS)
NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY (New York, NY)
ORLANDO SCIENCE CENTER (Orlando, FL)
QUEENS MUSEUM (Corona, NY)
TAUBMAN MUSEUM OF FINE ART (Roanoke, VA)
THOMAS COLE HISTORIC HOUSE (Catskill, NY)
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY (Martinsville, VA)

THE NATIONAL MEDAL FOR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICE

Since 1994, the National Medal for Museum and Library Service has honored 178 outstanding institutions that have made significant contributions to their communities. Selected institutions demonstrate innovative approaches and a strong commitment to public service and community outreach. They are active in urban, rural, or tribal areas and engage with their communities in diverse ways, including by enhancing literacy, providing services to at risk populations, supporting digital connectivity, and curating community narratives. The winners are selected by the director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services in consultation with the National Museum and Library Services Board.

THE INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums. We advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. Our vision is a nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities. To learn more, visit www.ims.gov.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES BOARD

The National Museum and Library Services Board is an advisory body that includes the IMLS director, deputy directors of the offices of museum and library services, and general counsel, and presidentially appointed members of the general public who have demonstrated expertise in, or commitment to, library or museum services. Informed by its collective experience and knowledge, the board advises the IMLS director on general policy and practices, and on selections for the National Medals for Museum and Library Service.

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Crosby Kemper III, Director, *IMLS**

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Jonathan L. Zittrain, *Massachusetts*

**nonvoting members*



The mission of IMLS is to advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. The agency's four strategic goals are to promote lifelong learning, build capacity, increase public access, and achieve excellence.

Learn more at www.imls.gov/about

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