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**STATE OF MARYLAND ANNOUNCES 2024 HERITAGE AWARD WINNERS**  
*\$60,000 in grants recognize long-term achievement in the traditional arts*



**BALTIMORE, MD** — The Maryland State Arts Council has announced the winners of the 2024 Heritage Awards through its traditional arts program, Maryland Traditions. Recognizing long-term achievement in the traditional arts, nominations are accepted in three categories: Person or People, Place, and Tradition. Six awards are being provided this year, each including a \$10,000 grant.

“This year’s Heritage Award winners reflect the traditions and enterprising spirit of communities from the Western Maryland mountains to the Eastern Shore,” said Maryland Department of Commerce Secretary Kevin Anderson. “We’re pleased to shine a light on their work as examples of our state’s strong cultural fabric.”

- **Donald Owens** has been a steward of Baltimore City’s African American community theater tradition since the 1970s, particularly through his work with the Arena Players, the oldest, continually-operating, historically Black community theater in the country. As the Players’ artistic director since 2007, Owens passes down the tradition through community-grounded acting, directing, writing, and teaching. (Person or People award category)
- **Angel Rivera** of Frederick is a master of the Puerto Rican percussion and dance traditions of *bomba* and *plena*, as well as the tradition of distilling *pitorro*, or moonshine rum. Rivera founded the first and only *bomba* and *plena* ensemble in the region and the only *pitorro* distillery in the continental United States. For more than forty years, Angel’s work has strengthened the sense of community in Maryland’s Puerto Rican diaspora. (Person or People award category)
- The Pocomoke Indian Nation continues their centuries-long relationship with the lands and waters of the **Pocomoke Homelands**, located on the Lower Eastern Shore in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties. Referenced by English explorer John Smith in 1608 and in 17th and 18th century treaties with the English Maryland Colony, tribal members continue to live on their homelands, where they practice land and water stewardship and educate the public about their tribal history and culture. (Place award category)
- Founded in 1972, Carroll County’s **Deer Creek Fiddlers’ Convention** is a supportive space in which musicians, dancers, singers, and songwriters from diverse traditional music backgrounds can connect, learn from one another, and compete. Prizes are awarded for performance on various instruments and in genres including old-time, bluegrass, folk, blues, and Celtic music. (Tradition award category)
- **The Emerald Isle Club** of Baltimore County was formed by Irish immigrants in 1956 to keep Irish traditions alive. Through monthly *ceilis*, or dances, and other events, the club offers all Marylanders opportunities to experience Irish music, dance, language, literature, and other aspects of Irish culture. (Tradition award category)
- On **Frostburg Derby Day**, children race small, homemade derby cars down Main Street in Allegany County while families and local business sponsors cheer them on. Organized by the Frostburg Elks since 1977, the tradition grew from the soapbox derby craze of the 1930s and 1940s. In some families, derby racing cars have achieved the status of family heirlooms, with as many as three generations of drivers having used the same car. (Tradition award category)

“The Heritage Awards are the Maryland State Arts Council’s effort to connect the arts with history, culture, and community,” said MSAC Executive Director Steven Skerritt-Davis. “Through the public nomination and review processes that help us determine the winners, this program shows that creative expression happens on a grassroots level just as often as it does in the gallery or the concert hall.”

Heritage Awards have been awarded annually since 2007 in honor of Dr. Alta Schrock, a Garrett County community leader who taught biology at Frostburg State University and founded groups, events, and publications to support traditional arts in Appalachian Maryland and beyond. Dr. Schrock’s legacy and work are a continuing source of inspiration for the Heritage Awards today.

To date, the council has provided 60 Heritage Awards. Previous winners can be viewed in the [Maryland Traditions Archive](#). MSAC will accept nominations for the 2025 Heritage Awards beginning this fall. Check [msac.org](#) for updates.

### **About MSAC**

Founded in 1967, MSAC is an agency of the State of Maryland Department of Commerce that plays an essential role, ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts. MSAC advances the arts in our state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland. To do this, the agency awards grants to not-for-profit, tax-exempt organizations for ongoing arts programming and projects, awards grants to individual artists, and provides technical and advisory assistance to individuals and groups. MSAC receives its funds in an annual appropriation from the State of Maryland and from grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. The Council may also receive contributions from private, non-governmental sources. For more information, go to [msac.org](#).

*Pictured above, clockwise from top left: Donald Owens; Angel Rivera; Pocomoke tribal elder Bud Howard, at left; a race at the Frostburg Derby Days; a ceili at the Emerald Isle Club; and late fiddler Claude Martin, after whom a Deer Creek Fiddlers' Convention prize is named. Images by Christopher Myers Photography, courtesy of Baltimore Magazine; Edwin Remsberg Photographs; Ken Koons; Frostburg Elks Lodge #470; Emerald Isle Club; and Pam Zappardino, courtesy of Common Ground on the Hill, respectively.*