

PRESS RELEASE

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Rep. John Murtha, National Park Service named among first recipients of Heritage Preservation Awards

Claudia Jones, Susan Kalcik & the Slovak Heritage Association of the Laurel Highlands also honored; awards to be presented at April 10, 2010 event

(JOHNSTOWN, Pa.) – The Johnstown Area Heritage Association today announced the honorees of the first annual Heritage Preservation Awards. Rep. John Murtha and The National Park Service are receiving a joint award for Outstanding Achievement for their collaborative efforts in preserving, celebrating and promoting Johnstown’s heritage. Claudia Jones, teacher, author and long-time advocate of preserving African-American heritage in the region; and Susan Kalcik and the work of the Slovak Heritage Association of the Laurel Highlands will also be recognized.

The honorees were selected by a Heritage Awards Committee of community leaders and will be recognized at a dinner held at the Frank J. Pasquerilla Conference Center on April 10, 2010. All award recipients will be in attendance.

Additionally, a Steering Committee, co-chaired by Tammy and Howard Bernstein, will be involved in the planning and implementation of the dinner.

About the Outstanding Achievement Award honorees

Rep. John Murtha

Rep. John Murtha and the National Park Service will jointly receive the Outstanding Achievement Award. Throughout his legislative career as a member of the House of Representatives, Rep. Murtha has advocated for many initiatives related to this area’s history and heritage. Highlights include:

- His indisputable leadership in establishing and nurturing a heritage infrastructure in this region that ultimately became a model for the National Heritage Area program, which today includes the Rivers of Steel in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

- Securing funding to preserve national heritage sites, including Fort Necessity National Park, Johnstown Flood National Memorial, Allegheny Portage National Railroad Historic Site, Johnstown Flood Museum, Gettysburg National Military Park, and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. Rep. Murtha also secured funding for the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile system of biking and hiking trails that connects Cumberland, Md. to Pittsburgh.
- Authoring legislation to establish the Flight 93 National Memorial in Pennsylvania.

"The Heritage Awards Committee was struck by how many of Rep. Murtha's heritage initiatives involved participation by the National Park Service," said Linda Thomson, chair of the awards committee.

The National Park Service

The National Park Service owns and operates several major attractions in the area that interpret and present the area's history and heritage for visitors.

- The Johnstown Flood National Memorial in St. Michael preserves a portion of the failed South Fork Dam and the clubhouse of the South Fork Fishing & Hunting Club. It is part of the Johnstown Discovery Network.
- Fort Necessity National Battlefield near Farmington interprets a key battle of the French & Indian War that was also the first event in Gen. George Washington's military career, as well as the development of the National Road, the first federally funded road in America. The site recently underwent major development with the construction of the Fort Necessity/National Road Interpretive and Education Center.
- Allegheny Portage National Historic Site tells the story of the railroad and canal system that conquered the Allegheny Mountains. The site also preserves the 900' Staple Bend Tunnel, the first railroad tunnel built in this country.
- Flight 93 National Memorial preserves the site where Flight 93 crashed on September 11, 2001. The first phase of the permanent memorial is scheduled to be open on the tenth anniversary of 9/11.
- Friendship Hill National Historic Site commemorates the life and accomplishments of Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury under Thomas Jefferson. Gallatin played a major role in the funding of the Louisiana Purchase, the development of the National Road, the Lewis and Clark expedition, among other developments and expansion in early America.

“The National Park Service mission is built on preserving, interpreting and making accessible our natural and cultural resources,” said Jeff Lavine, a member of the awards committee. “The National Park sites in this area contribute to carrying out the mission of understanding our regional cultural heritage. Additionally, collaborative partnerships in the community and various educational and outreach efforts further enhance the Park Service’s contribution to the celebration of heritage embodied in the award.”

Additional honorees

Claudia Jones

Claudia Jones has worked tirelessly for the preservation and promotion of African-American history in Johnstown. An associate professor of biology emeritus at Pitt-Johnstown, Jones’ accomplishments include:

- Ongoing research into Johnstown’s African-American history, and serving as a resource for Black History Month for area churches and schools.
- Development of a slide presentation on local African-American history, which she has presented in a variety of venues.
- Active with the local chapter of the NAACP, where she introduced a project to recognize Heritage Members over 85 years of age while preserving their stories. She has chaired the Heritage Committee for 10 years. In this role, she finds African-American Golden Heritage Members, interviews them and compiles the information into a souvenir booklet. Jones then organizes a banquet honoring 10-20 Golden Heritage Members every two years.
- Organization and presentation of an annual event on African-American history at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church, where she is a member.
- Active participant in JAHA’s African-American History Project, which built upon existing research about early African-American settlements in Johnstown.
- Founder of the Greater Johnstown Minority Scholars Club, and has held the title of coordinator. The organization was founded in 1984 to help guide and motivate students from area high schools and their parents to pursue upward mobility through higher education.
- The ongoing collection and preservation of photographs depicting African-American life in greater Johnstown from as early as the 1930s.

“Needless to say, her work schedule is without time constraints, to help make Johnstown knowledgeable of the African-American achievements and the Black Community,” wrote Dr. Clea Patrick Hollis, president of the Johnstown branch of the NAACP, in her nomination.

Susan Kalcik and the Slovak Heritage Association of the Laurel Highlands

Susan Kalcik was instrumental in the founding of the Slovak Heritage Association of the Laurel Highlands (SHALH) in 1996, and has been active in the organization ever since. The organization's mission is to preserve, study, celebrate, share and teach the heritage of one of the largest ethnic groups in the region.

Kalcik first came to the area in 1990 to participate in a study of the region as part of the America's Industrial Heritage Project. She decided to spend the rest of her life here, and soon helped found SHALH, serving first as the association's librarian-archivist (1997-2005), then as president (2005-2009) and currently as vice-president.

The accomplishments of SHALH include:

- Presentations of lectures, re-enactments, museum exhibitions, and children's programs on Slovak culture
- A bimonthly newsletter on Slovak culture that is distributed to readers and libraries in more than 20 states
- Six membership meetings yearly at which educational programs are presented

"Susan has been responsible for implementing many fine programs in the Johnstown area, and the quality and organization of these programs is especially noteworthy. She has done an excellent job in recreating the Slovak culture in many of her activities," wrote Joseph T. Senko, Slovak Honorary Consul for Pennsylvania, in his nomination.

In addition to her activities through SHALH, Kalcik has demonstrated her commitment to the preservation of the Slovak culture in these ways:

- Helped direct the ethnic fieldworkers for the America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP) in Johnstown, overseeing the collection of material from the project; then spent a year full-time at the library of IUP, where she organized the archives of the material.
- Served for two years as executive director of the Bottle Works Ethnic Arts Center.
- Published several papers in scholarly journals on ethnicity, many of which focus on aspects of Johnstown and Slovak culture; some of these were presented at annual meetings of the American Folklore Society.
- Currently writing a book on Johnstown Slovaks.

"Ms. Kalcik has made innumerable contributions to the study, preservation and celebration of the ethnic heritage of Johnstown," wrote Nicholas Bocher, who also nominated Kalcik. "She has been an organizing force and inspiration for many of the ethnic groups here."

About the Heritage Preservation Award Dinner on April 10

The Heritage Preservation Awards will be presented at a dinner event on April 10, to be held at the Frank J. Pasquerilla Conference Center. A volunteer steering committee is organizing the event, which will be open to the public.

Also on April 10, a new exhibit, "Did You Know?" will be unveiled in the second-floor galleries of the Heritage Discovery Center. The exhibit will celebrate little-known facts about Johnstown and other things that make Johnstown unique. It will be drawn largely from JAHA's extensive archive of photographs, documents and objects that relate to Johnstown's history.

About the Heritage Preservation Awards

The Heritage Preservation Awards are a new program of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association. JAHA sought nominations from the Johnstown community, and a volunteer awards committee made the final decisions.

Criteria for award nominees were as follows:

- Nominees must have contributed to preserving, celebrating or promoting Johnstown's heritage
- May have made their contributions from any field, personally or professionally
- May be well-known, or relatively unrecognized
- Do not have to be a native or resident of Johnstown, but must have a clear relationship with its people and its past
- Must be living; no awards will be given posthumously, except in rare exceptions as determined by the committee
- May be individuals, corporations or organizations

The Heritage Awards Committee members are:

- Committee chair: Linda Thomson, President, Johnstown Area Regional Industries
- Dr. Walter Azonevich, President, Penn Highlands Community College
- Phyllis Bandstra, Executive Director, Goodwill Industries
- Jeffrey Lavine, Retired Chief Financial Officer, Pitt-Johnstown
- The Honorable Timothy Creany, President Judge, Cambria County Court of Common Pleas

The Steering Committee members are:

- Tammy & Howard Bernstein, Co-Chairs
- Mitchell G. Azar
- Karen Azer
- Marvin D. Baker
- Mary Ann Bennear
- Mary P. Borkow

- Ronald P. Carnevali, Jr., Esq.
- Lana Custer
- Edward Lentz Dreikorn III
- George Griffith
- Mary Ann Jacobs
- Michael Kane
- Elmer C. Laslo
- Elizabeth Mayer
- Danette Overdorff
- Mark E. Pasquerilla
- William Polacek
- Mary Anne Rizzo
- Edward J. Sheehan, Jr.
- Ernest R. Walker, Esq.
- Kathleen Wallace
- Dr. George Zitnay

The Johnstown Area Heritage Association is a non-profit, membership-based organization dedicated to preserving and showcasing Johnstown's unique history to the nation through high-quality educational, cultural and recreational experiences. JAHA owns and operates the Johnstown Flood Museum, the Frank & Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center, and the Wagner-Ritter House & Garden. The Johnstown Children's Museum opened in June 2009 in the Heritage Discovery Center. June 2009 also marked the premiere of "The Mystery of Steel" film in the Iron & Steel Gallery. JAHA also programs regular workshops and other events for children, cultural presentations for adults, and other special events, including the AmeriServ Flood City Music Festival. For more information on JAHA programs, museums and events, visit www.jaha.org.