

Susan Hildreth: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us for the 2014 National Medal for Museum and Library Service award ceremony.

We are here to recognize the extraordinary work of 10 outstanding museums and libraries from across the nation and to celebrate the valuable role these institutions, and all museums and libraries, play in our communities. You will hear about how the medal winners demonstrate extraordinary and innovative public service.

We know that these libraries and museums change lives. And, we asked each institution to select a community member to travel with them to Washington to receive the award. You will hear how their lives have been changed.

Today, these ten great American places join 132 other National Medal winners as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the award, the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums.

The 10 institutions we recognize today show us what is possible. They are places that are using their physical and digital spaces, their collections and their dedicated staffs to make a real difference in community life.

We are proud to have members of the National Museum and Library Services Board with us today: Our board members bring passion and leadership to the Institute of Museum and Library Services' mission and help strengthen the educational and cultural life of our country. They also lend their expertise to the National Medal selection process by their careful review of nominations and sharing insightful recommendations. Thank you for your dedication and expertise. We all very much appreciate your support. (Applause.)

We are also pleased to have Diane Frankel here with us today. Diane was the first Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and her idea for a national award has blossomed into what you see today. So thank you Diane.

Wise advisors are so important to the success of any organization. Our winning institutions have asked board members and public officials to join them here today, and I'd like to recognize each of you. Would the board members of each institution please stand? Thank you.

And of course, our communities are made stronger by public officials who work hard on behalf of their constituents every day. We are delighted to have several members of Congress with us today. I would like to recognize United States Representative Andre Carson of Indiana's 7th Congressional District, United States Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York's 8th Congressional District, and United States Representative Danny K. Davis of Illinois' 7th Congressional District. We are also delighted to have the Mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel with us today.

I'd like to also recognize our great partner, Storycorps. Storycorps is a national nonprofit dedicated to recording, preserving, and sharing the stories of America. They will visit each winning institution to document stories from the community. Since 2010, they have conducted 840 National Medal interviews

in communities across the country. All of the interviews are preserved by the Library of Congress's Center for American Folklife.

And, we are most grateful to our partner HISTORY. HISTORY has been extremely supportive of the National Medal. Since 2007 they have produced videos that showcase our National Medal recipients and their contributions to their community.

This year's winners represent the best of our nation's libraries and museums. There are countless stories across the country of Americans, young and old, learning, enjoying, and opening doors to new and deeply powerful experiences at their local museum or library.

And now it is my distinct pleasure and deep honor to introduce Mrs. Michelle Obama, the First Lady of the United States.

Mrs. Obama: Thank you. (Applause.) Good afternoon, everyone. It's a -- afternoon or morning? Good morning. (Laughter.) Well, hello, everyone, and welcome to a little museum that we like to call the White House. (Laughter.)

I want to welcome all of you -- our election officials, all the board members, the community members. We are grateful to have you here. And, Susan, thank you very much for that tremendous introduction, as well as your outstanding leadership. We are so grateful.

And of course, I want to recognize our guests of honor, this year's winners of the National Medal for Museums and Library Services. You all are redefining what it means to lead a museum or a library in the 21st century. All across the country -- from Brooklyn, New York, to Independence, Missouri, to Gallup, New Mexico -- you all are putting our -- your programs and exhibitions up to help us expand our horizons and connect us with the rest of the world.

You offer dynamic classrooms for folks of all ages, from toddlers to grandparents. You serve as a gateway to technology for so many in your communities. And as any mom with young kids will tell you, on a rainy weekend afternoon, you are a welcome haven -- (laughter) -- where kids can learn and explore.

And really, the work to engage and empower our young people is some of the most important work that all of you do. You're teaching kids how to get their hands dirty in community gardens -- my favorite. You're showing them how to dance and choreograph moves of their own -- another one of my favorites. You're opening up your planetarium doors and taking these young people on trips to outer space. And when schools get out in the summers, you all are stepping up with all sorts of camps and learning opportunities. So instead of spending months sitting in front of the television, our young people are stretching their minds, they're making new friends, and they're having a great time as they do it.

For example, at the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, you're leading summer expeditions where kids excavate dinosaur bones alongside professional paleontologists. At the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut, you're offering summer internships to teach young people about marine biology, and you're doing it by helping them feed and train beluga whales -- very impressive. And at the North

Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, you're offering a weeklong "Summer Ed-Venture" program with hikes and overnight camping to help kids discover the science that surround us in our natural environment.

So the work that you do in the summers, and throughout the year, quite frankly, is filling a crucial role for our country as we strive to give our young people a world-class education. And as First Lady, as many of you know, that's one of the issues that I am very passionate about. I am passionate about giving our kids the skills and support they need to reach their fullest potential.

And that's why, just last week, I announced my Reach Higher initiative, where we're hoping to inspire young people to continue their education beyond high school. And whether that's at a professional training program or a community college, or a four-year college or university, we all know that in order for today's young people to be able to compete in a global economy, a high school diploma just is not enough.

So we're helping students understand the path they need to take to achieve their education by focusing on things like financial aid, college visits, supporting our high school counselors, and providing young people with summer learning opportunities to give them a chance to compete and understand what they want to get out of their education.

So we're helping students in that way because we're depending on young people to set big goals for themselves. That's one of my messages, for them to reach higher and to work harder, to work like crazy to get where they want to be. But we all know that these kids can't do it alone. That's why we need all of us -- all of us -- helping these kids step up in every way.

So we're going to be getting everybody involved in this effort -- from business owners and government leaders, to congregations and community groups, and of course, libraries and museums like the ones you all represent. In fact, all of you are providing perfect examples of the kind of opportunities that we need to make sure that all our young people have.

So I want to applaud you for those efforts. But I also want to challenge you. I want to challenge you to reach even higher for those kids in your communities who you might not see so often -- the kids who only make it to your buildings on a class field trip, the kids who don't know how to get a library card, the kids whose neighborhoods don't offer a lot of positive learning environments.

And these kids exist in every single one of our communities. And I know many of you are already touching these kids, but it is up to us to reach higher for them and to give them the opportunities they need to fulfill their boundless potential. And, again, all of you are already well on your way, which is why we're so thrilled and honored to have you here.

This is a special privilege for me, to be here with all of you. And I am particularly excited that you have brought community members along with you to share in this day. So once again, congratulations on this honor.

And now, I want to turn it over to Gladstone Payton from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to present the medals. Thank you, all, and welcome.

Gladstone Payton: Accepting the award for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn, New York, are

- Executive Director Scott Medbury and
- Community Member Chidi Duke

At the age of 11, Chidi Duke was introduced to Brooklyn Botanic Garden through Project Green Reach, a science enrichment program led by the garden in his Brooklyn elementary school. His teacher recommended him for the Children’s Garden program, where Chidi became captivated with the plant world. His role in the Children’s Garden grew progressively. Eventually he became a leader and mentor to younger participants. He enrolled in the Brooklyn Academy of Science and Environment, the public high school co-founded by Brooklyn Botanic Garden and Prospect Park Alliance with the Department of Education. Chidi is now a student at The City University of New York’s John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He continues to be a part of Brooklyn Botanic Garden as an instructor for teens.

Accepting the award for the Chicago Public Library, Chicago, Illinois are:

- Brian Bannon, Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library and
- Community member Chris Force

Chris Force started his business at the Chicago Public Library. He is founder and editor-in-chief of commercial publisher Alarm Press. When Chris decided he wanted to start a magazine business, he turned to the library.

Using library resources, he learned about management, marketing, and financing. The library was his business incubator, where he booked meeting rooms and found free databases to source leads. The librarians gave him guidance and support, and introduced him to publications he never knew existed. Chris now employs about 120 individuals. He makes them all get library cards and receive orientation training at Chicago Public Library. Chris says, “Sometimes as a small business owner all you need is anyone, even your local librarian, to give you some encouragement. Chicago is a great city for that, and the Chicago Public Library is great resource for any small business owner.”

Accepting the award for The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana are:

- President and CEO, Jeffrey H. Patchen and
- Community member Spencer Hahn together with his mother Erica Hahn

Eight-year old Spencer Hahn suffered a stroke in-utero that damaged half of his brain, and further complications led to lifelong challenges. Doctors thought he would never walk or talk. Seeking to stimulate her son’s mind with new experiences, Spencer’s mother, Erica Hahn, brought him to The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis. There, something extraordinary began to happen—Spencer responded. The museum provided an environment where Spencer felt happy and safe. At the Playscape exhibit, which was created to encourage the youngest kids to reach developmental milestones, Spencer

took his first steps. After that, Spencer experienced other “firsts” at the museum: his first successful attempt at climbing and his first word. Spencer loves the museum’s theater and mascot, Rex, and continues his hands-on learning every time he visits his favorite museum.

Accepting the award for the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District, Las Vegas, Nevada are

- Executive Director Jeanne Goodrich and
- Community member Avree Walker

Community member Avree Walker is a shining example of how libraries change lives. Avree “grew up” at the West Las Vegas Library branch of the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District, using the collection and electronic resources for schoolwork and for research projects and papers. The library’s introduced Avree to a world outside his neighborhood, and inspired him to pursue his passion for dance. Today, Avree is pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in dance from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and is a dancer with Las Vegas Contemporary Dance Theatre. He gives back to his community and library by working with youth at the library as both a choreographer and a producer.

Accepting the Award for the Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, Missouri, are

- Library Director and CEO Steven V. Potter and
- Community Member Alicia Moore

In deciding where she and her family would move, Alicia Moore took a community’s library into serious consideration. As a homeschooling mom, she knew that she would depend on the library for materials to support her children’s learning. Mid-Continent Public Library’s Homeschoolers at the Library program in Liberty, Missouri, made the grade. The library partners with homeschooling families to get them the materials, programs, research databases, and assistance they need at any of their 35 locations. Each week, Alicia’s third and fifth graders spend hours at local branches, in the study rooms, checking out books, and attending all kinds of programs, from bookclubs to magic shows. She says, “As parents, we want to teach our children the value of reading books for both recreation and education. Thankfully, we have found a community-oriented library where our children feel comfortable.”

Accepting the Award for the Mystic Aquarium, Mystic, Connecticut, are:

- President and CEO Dr. Stephen M. Coan and
- Community Member Justin Richard

Justin Richard never expected a quick aquarium visit between college tours in Connecticut to turn into an avenue for pursuing his passion. During his first visit to Mystic Aquarium, he was mesmerized by the beluga whale. He volunteered at the aquarium and became involved in a comprehensive, hands-on summer internship. He became a marine mammal trainer, working for the aquarium for eight years training animals and educating students and the general public about them. Justin enrolled at the University of Rhode Island to study science and to become more involved with marine mammals. He is pursuing a Ph.D. there in integrative and evolutionary biology through a National Science Foundation

fellowship. Justin's relationship with Mystic Aquarium continues with his research into non-invasive ways to monitor the health of wild beluga populations.

Accepting the Award for North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, Raleigh, North Carolina, are:

- Museum Director Dr. Emlyn Kostner and
- Community Member Molly Paul

At five, Molly Paul decided she was going to be a marine biologist and aquarium director. That was when Molly's parents took her to the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science and Molly fell in love. Since then she has spent countless hours in the exhibits and sitting in front of the fish tanks. She attended a museum camp and found mentors in the museum staff. She was even inspired to begin her own turtle adoption organization for unwanted pet turtles. Molly's passion and enthusiasm for marine life grew when she was accepted into the museum's Junior Curator Program, working with the Fish and Invertebrates Department. And now, as a high school sophomore she spends more than three days a week at the museum. Molly says, "The museum is my second home, it's where I'm the happiest. The museum has helped shape me into a lifelong learner, active community member, and leader."

Accepting the Award for Octavia Fellin [Pronunciation] Public Library, Gallup, New Mexico, are:

- Director Mary Ellen Pellington and
- Community Member Maria Elena Reyes

Maria Elena Reyes grew up on the Navajo Nation in Pinedale, New Mexico. The reservation elementary school had limited resources, so at an early age, she became acquainted with the Octavia Fellin Public Library. She remembers her mother taking the long drive to Gallup, so that she could attend library programs, use its resources for school projects, or escape into a good book. Now a mother herself, Maria brings her children, two young boys, aged three and five, to the library to inspire their love of reading. Maria views the Octavia Fellin Public Library as an important community resource, providing access to books, educational and child-centric programming, and collections in the Navajo language.

Accepting the Award for Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, Norman, Oklahoma, are:

- Director Dr. Michael A. Mares and
- Community member Ernesto Vargas

If there was anything that Ernesto Vargas knew at age sixteen, it was that he was passionate about science. In pursuing his interest, Ernesto signed up for the ExplorOlogy, a program at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. Through the program's Paleo Expedition, Ernesto went on summer field expeditions with real scientists. He was surrounded by people who shared his desire to explore, and Ernesto began volunteering as a museum docent. The following year, he joined the Paleo Expedition trip as a peer mentor. His hard work and service at the museum contributed to his selection as a Gates Millennium Scholar and he now studies geology and paleontology at the University of Chicago. He says, "As a future scientist, I look forward to one day sharing my knowledge and experience with others, just like the scientists at the Sam Noble Museum's ExplorOlogy program did for me."

Accepting the Award for Yiddish Book Center, Amherst, Massachusetts, are:

- Founder and President, Aaron Lansky and
- Community Member Dr. Peter Manseau

As a French-Irish Catholic attending college in Amherst, Massachusetts, Peter Manseau knew little about Jewish culture and Yiddish works before his summer internship at the Yiddish Book Center in 1996. During his time in the program, Peter found himself immersed in the literature and fascinated by religious culture. He learned about Jewish history and culture and the Yiddish language. Drawing from his experience at the Yiddish Book Center, Peter was inspired to write *Songs for the Butcher's Daughter*, an award-winning novel about Yiddish literature and preservation. Peter received his doctorate from Georgetown University in religion and is currently a fellow in American religious history at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Mrs. Obama: Well, what an excellent array of programs. We are so proud of all of you. We're just hopeful that this is the boost that you need to keep doing the great work that you're doing. Having it here at the White House, having the media here, remembering that you all are opening so many doors for people in communities across this country. It is an honor and a privilege. Everyone, let's give these awardees another round of applause. (Applause.)

And that concludes our program, but we're going to open up those doors. We have a wonderful reception for everyone here. I promised someone over there some cookies. (Laughter.) And he's been suffering through all of this -- (laughter) -- just waiting for the cookies. So I don't think I will delay any longer.

Once again, it's an honor to have you all here. Congratulations, and we look forward to seeing you again next year. So enjoy. (Applause.)