

National Medal for Museum and Library Service Ceremony
December 5, 2011

Susan Hildreth: The National Medal for Museum and Library Service is the highest national honor conferred on museums and libraries for services to their communities. The institutions we honor tonight have been chosen for their innovative approaches to public service and for their success in improving communities and making a difference in people's lives. I would like to read an excerpt from a letter from First Lady Michelle Obama to our honorees. Museums and libraries inspire us to stretch our imaginations and play an important role in exposing Americans of all ages and backgrounds to fresh ideas. They teach our children new skills and ways of thinking, and even help to promote lifelong wellness. From big cities to small towns, this year's medal winners are making tremendous contributions to our communities through innovative programming and a commitment to excellence. You are helping to lift up all those who visit your institutions and I hope you take pride in all you have accomplished. I second Mrs. Obama's sentiments and add my congratulations to the winners of the 2011 National Medal for Museum and Library Service. Thank you for everything you do. It is now my honor to introduce our special guest, who will in a few minutes join me in presenting the medals. Cokie Roberts is an award winning journalist and author, a senior news analyst for NPR News, where she was the Congressional Correspondent for more than 10 years and political commentator for ABC News, providing analysis for all networking news programming. She has won many awards including three Emmys. She has been inducted into the Broadcasting and Cable Hall of Fame and was cited by American Women in Radio and Television as one of the 50 greatest women in the history of broadcasting. She is a sought after speaker and we are so honored that she is taking part in this event this evening. Please welcome Cokie Roberts.

Cokie Roberts: What a treat it is to be with all of these people doing such wonderful work and honoring them, particularly here at the Capitol. I mean, I love this place. I grew up here. This is a beautiful room, look at it. When you're in hearings here, you can just start looking at the ceiling and not having to pay attention to what they're talking about, but which is good. But the contentiousness here is so awful these days, that to be able to come into this institution, which really is the place where we should be coming together, that's what congress means, and you librarians can point that out to some children and particularly to some grown ups. And but, instead of having the contention here we are all together to honor people who have done wonderful, wonderful work. And I am really happy to have been asked to join with the Institute for Museum and Library Services and my Public Radio colleague, David Isay, who has been bringing the history of this country through the spoken word throughout the country. The Library of Congress, of course, has all of his StoryCorps recordings, but it's all over the country and the StoryCorps mobile,

what do you call that thing? Is that what's it's called? That's good. Do you like that? Like the old bookmobiles and of course, you hear them on National Public Radio. I got my first library card when I was five years old and I remember it very well because we-- my mother marched me into the local library. It was on Lee Circle in New Orleans. And they told her that I couldn't have a card until I was six. And she said, "But she's reading." And they said, "No, she can't have a card." And my mother was the wrong person to say this too. And she then-- but she is-- she is I'm happy to say, she is with us at 95. She very graciously, as she always is, worked out a compromise, something that when she was in Congress, they still knew how to do. And she said, "Well, suppose we arrange it so that if she can write her name on the card, she can have a card?" And the librarian just basically was out of resources to say no, and so I wrote my name and got my card. And have been an avid user of libraries ever since. I now have two library cards; my local Montgomery County Public Library here and my Library of Congress Researcher's card, which I have to work really hard for. And of course, the role of museums in our lives is always so incredibly important and you never know when it's going to make an enormous difference. Recently, just last Martin Luther King holiday in January I had one of my grandsons for the day and he said, "I want to go to see something about Martin Luther King.", and it was before the monument had opened and happily because I wouldn't have wanted to go there in January, and the American History Museum, the Museum of American History or whatever it's called now, was having a whole Martin Luther King presentation and he was mesmerized. And now, and he was six, five and now can tell you a great deal about Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement and all that because he had that experience in a museum. I had an experience in a museum that really in some ways changed my life. We lived in Greece for about four years. My husband was the New York Time Bureau Chief there and I was stringing for various news organizations, mainly CBS and we used to go to Marathon all the time, with the-- our kids were little. And we'd go to the beach at Marathon, but of course, Marathon, it's Marathon and there's a big mound there that's supposed to be where the Persians were buried. But the-- if you go back into the hills, there just sort of nestled into the bottom of one of the hills is this tiny museum, just tiny. And it's from thousands of years before the battle of Marathon, and it has all of these very simple objects in it. It has some cooking utensils and it's got some jewelry and it's got some weapons and it's got some objects for worship and I looked in, and it's tiny, and I looked at those things and I thought, for women we could open those cases and put on those jewels and take up those tools and start right where those women from 5,000 years ago left off without missing a beat. For men, they'd have to be priests or warriors, which is why I think they didn't let women in for a long time, but for women that sense of continuity was so evident and so strong that it's really affected my work tremendously. I mean, I wrote a book called, *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters* as a result of that experience, and I have-- it has very much informed my life since then. So I am a great believer in both libraries and museums and in the power that they have in our lives. I must say our children in those years in Greece did feel terribly oppressed having to read every sign in every museum. My husband just will not it rest, but it was a great learning experience, as it continues to be, of course, here at home. And

the wonderful stories that you saw glimpses of in this nice video and that you'll hear a little bit more about as we give the awards, really do give you a sense of the scope of these institutions and how they interact in their communities, both with individuals in the communities and with the groups in the communities and with the community as a whole. And so, anything from the Weippe Public Library helping a family when it relocated from Arizona to Idaho, to the Brooklyn Museum. I mean, these are the difference of sizes where the-- where tremendous inspiration to a young artist, to the Madison Children's Museum providing performance opportunities to a brain damaged young man who was able to find work there and do performances that really made his life meaningful. So it is great that we are celebrating these libraries and museums. As you know better than I, but it always bears restating, it's a tough, tough time. You've got more demands on you than ever before in history and fewer resources and that is really difficult. Every public library these days or any one worth its salt is serving as a whole community institution where people come and they come in to use the computers and do their resumes there and they are buying fewer books, so they're sitting and reading books in the library or taking books out of the library. Community organizations are meeting in libraries because that's where they can afford to meet, and so hours have to be longer and staff is stretched and of course the cutbacks from government agencies are great. And that really does create enormous problems, and it also comes at a time when everybody is being required, and I think the word is required, to modernize constantly. That fascinating little clip we saw from the Minnesota Seminary, no it's a priory. What is it? A monastery, thank you. I actually speak Catholic, but my mother was the Ambassador to the Vatican, right, which is a whole other story. But the absolute demand to go digital is really just-- it's fundamental because anyone who's doing research now has got to be able to get to that information on his or her computer where ever they are, and so to make that possible is also now-- it's not an option. So all of that is a tremendous responsibility, and the same things is true of museums where more and more relevance is required more and more community outreach, more and more, again, the good news, there's a good news part of this. Good news is that more and more people are using the museums as they have fewer dollars to spend on other forms of entertainment, but it puts a tremendous stress on staff and on the institutions. I think the other really good news, and certainly the people here in this room who are getting these wonderful awards are the most exemplary of it. The other good news is that the museums and libraries are stepping up to it. I am so impressed with the work that's being done, with the imagination that is coming to the fore as people find ways to deal with the difficulties that they're facing and understand that one of the ways is to be more and more engaged in the community and have the community be more and more and more engaged in the institutions. That's the way it always should have been anyway. And I know it's really hard work, and I know I'm just saying it and it's easy for me to say and it's really hard for you to do, but it is really important that you do it, and it's wonderful that you are doing it and I am very honored to be able to salute you tonight. So thank you.

Susan Hildreth: Thank you, Cokie for those inspiring remarks. I would now like to introduce Mary Chute, the IMLS Deputy Director for Library Services and Claudia French, the Deputy Director for Museum Services, who will read the names of the medalists and those accepting the medals and tell you a little bit about each of our winners.

Mary Chute: Hi everyone. It's great to have you here. Because the national medal is about service to the community, each medal winner has brought with them someone on whom their institution has had a significant positive impact. Claudia and I will read the names of the honorees and briefly summarize the stories of these members of the communities. When we call your names, please come forward and receive your medal from Susan and Cokie.

Alachua County Library District in Gainesville, Florida, Director Shaney T. Livingston, Ward Chair Sherwin Henry and community member Lenore Krome. Lenore started using the Archer Library branch of the Alachua County Library District by bringing her small children to attend programs and check out numerous books. By exposing her family to the joy of reading and the wonders of the world outside of their little town and by using the library and her teaching, Lenore has taken full advantage of this small, rural library. All right. Thank you. That's great.

The Columbus Metropolitan Library in Columbus, Ohio; CFO Dewitt Harold, Board Chair, Roger Sugarman and community member Khamall Howard. Khamall joined the library summer youth program as a high school sophomore and eventually took on a leadership role in the program. During his senior year, he was hired as a library services aid. Library of Congress, here we go right there.

The Hill Museum and Manuscript Library in Collegeville, Minnesota; Director Father Columba Stewart, Board Chair Thomas Joyce and community member Getatchew Haile. In 1975 while recovering from a brutal beating he received as he was evicted from his native Ethiopia, Dr. Haile was hired by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library. His work there has been instrumental in preserving the history of Ethiopia.

The San Jose Public Library in San Jose, California. We have to let Susan do her little California cheer. Director Jane Light, Board Chair Jean Lee, community member Vikram Kanth. Vikram now a freshman at the US Naval Academy learned to love his library at an early age when his immigrant parents brought him there for its children's services. Vikram has since paid the library back by organizing a not-for-profit to raise funds for the library.

The Weippe Public Library and Discovery Center in Weippe, Idaho; Director Terri Summerfield, Acting Board Chair Marjorie Kuchynka, I think I have that right, Kuchynka, community member Grady Thompson. Grady discovered all the library had to offer after moving to Weippe from Tucson in 2008, especially enamored of the library's safe and inviting atmosphere, Grady and her family have used the library for everything from children's programs to paying bills online.

Claudia French: All right museums, where's Brooklyn? Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; Director Arnold Lehman, Board Chair Jack Tamagni and community member Virginia Vergara. An art enthusiast from an early age, Virginia gained knowledge and confidence in the Brooklyn Museum's apprentice program. She is now a visual artist and art professional.

EdVenture Children's Museum, Columbia, South Carolina; Director Catherine Horne, community member Noah Aitchison Adams and his mom Mary. Mary and Noah joined EdVenture Community Health Initiative, the Big Ed Health Team, four years ago. Noah has made many trips through Eddie, a 40 foot, 17 ton museum centerpiece designed to teach people about the human body. Bravo.

All right, Erie, Pennsylvania. Erie Art Museum; Director John Vanco, community member Victoria Angelo. Victoria became involved with the Eerie Art Museum in 2004 as part of the Old Songs, New Opportunities Project where she learned how to work in an American daycare setting and had to use her traditional African song and dance on the job. She is now one of the 30 artists featured in the museum's exhibit, Making It Better, Folk Arts in Pennsylvania Today.

I know there's a lot of people from here. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, Virginia; Director Frank Robinson, Board Chair Bill King and community member Christ Corsello. Chris, working with his aid, Lisa Watts, has volunteered at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens for nearly two years. He enjoys making a meaningful contribution to the garden and appreciates the community he has found there.

And last, but not least, Madison Children's Museum, Madison, Wisconsin; Director Ruth Shelly and community member Benjamin Perreth. Ben, who suffered a brain hemorrhage at the age of seven, and has survived numerous surgeries and other medical challenges, began volunteering as a juggler at MCM. He now what he calls his dream job working with the museum as a visitor services associate.

Susan Hildreth: I am so impressed with all these wonderful medalists, and particularly we have so many young people representing as our community members. We're very, very proud of them and we know we're making a difference in their lives.