The 39th Annual Wheaton & Kensington Community Awards Gala Wednesday, October 18, 2023, from 6 - 9 pm

1) 2023 Chamber Tribute Award Montgomery Housing Partnership

The Wheaton & Kensington Chamber of Commerce honors Montgomery Housing Partnership this year with the 2023 Chamber of Commerce Tribute Award given in recognition of their significant contributions preserving and expanding access to quality affordable housing as a nonprofit real estate developer, and helping to improve stability for low-and moderate-income families. MHP's longtime President Robert Goldman collaborates with citizens, businesses, public officials, and community organizations helps to build strong, vital neighborhoods. MHP has been a generous sponsor of our Holiday Mixers and Annual Awards, and is a true supporter of the WK Chamber.

MHP also manages a variety of programs and wraparound services to support and empower their residents. They offer educational programs ensuring that children get guidance and enrichment to help them thrive in school. This includes preschool, afterschool and summer enrichment programs serving more than 400 children. In operation since 1989, MHP provides more than 2,800 homes in Montgomery County, and surrounding communities. MHP also works with residents to implement neighborhood revitalization programs in communities affected by foreclosures, economic challenges, and those impacted by Purple Line construction. There are so many ways that they serve Montgomery County and beyond, and their properties impact the lives so many people in our community.

President Robert Goldman, accepting

Mid County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) Outstanding Resident of the Year: Samnang Wu

Samnang Wu has lived in Montgomery County since 1981 and is a resident of Aspen Hill. She has spent four decades serving and volunteering in her community. For more than 37 years, she worked with the Montgomery Department of Heath where she provided immigrants from Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe with cultural outreach and education on tuberculosis, hepatitis, HIV, AIDS, STDs and family planning. Ms. Wu continues volunteering with AARP where she helps seniors throughout the state.

Ms. Wu and her daughter survived the Khmer Rouge genocide and spent years in a refugee camp before coming to America. When asked why she has served the community for so many years, Ms. Wu vividly recalls when she first came to America and the donated oversized pink suit she wore to her first job interview. She cried tears of joy when she was offered the position. She believes her mission is to give others the same helping hand and opportunities she was provided when she arrived. Ms. Wu is also the former Cambodian Senior Association President and winner of the 2013 National Press Club Working Woman award.

3) Mid County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) Outstanding Association of the Year Award:

Oak Chapel United Methodist Church

The Oak Chapel United Ministries Hub (OCUMH) is the official outreach entity of the Oak Chapel United Methodist Church. For years the church ran a small food pantry, but during the pandemic, Montgomery County invited them to become a consolidated services Hub in the 20906 zip code. The Hub began as a contactless distribution center serving around 250 families weekly, but grew to reach over 500 while including home deliveries and distributions to apartment and schools. In their second year of operations, case management services were added to assist families. In the third year, they started a choice-style pantry allowing families in the 20906 community to shop inside the building and added tabling events inviting agencies to share information. Between the 300 families served by the pantry and other distributions, Oak Chapel served over 600 families weekly.

Now, with the reduction in County funding, the Oak Chapel Hub functions as an independent food service provider. They reduced their choice-style pantry to only 200 families, primarily those with children under 3, but still make home deliveries and off-site distributions; about 350 families continue to be served weekly. Oak Chapel has a congregation of less than 100 members, but plays a vital and impactful role helping with food insecurity and connecting people in need to vital social services – especially in a time of inflation and demographic change in Montgomery County.

Pastor Sherri E. Wood-Powe, accepting

4)
Wheaton Urban District Advisory Commttee Best Property Improvement of the Year
The Caramelo Bakery Mural by artist Eric B. Ricks for The Art & Walkability Project,
Skokum LLC property owner

The new mural "Beauty Is The Proper Resting Place For Enlightened Consciousness" is on the Price Avenue side of Caramelo Bakery, at 11301 Georgia Avenue in Wheaton, Skokum LLC, property owner. Artist Eric B. Ricks was the winner of a mural competition initiated and directed by The Art and Walkability Project and partner One Montgomery Green to paint an outdoor mural celebrating downtown Wheaton and its variety of cultures, as part of its mission to promote walkability using a strategy of incorporating art on surfaces and structures in the public realm. The project helps make Wheaton an enjoyable place to walk where people can experience art daily, to enhance the sense of community, as well as attract visitors to strengthen our local economy.

The mural received funding from the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) Public Art Across Maryland (PAAM) program, Wheaton Arts Walls Foundation Inc. and Greenhill Realty Co., the Wheaton Urban District, the Montgomery County Arts and Humanities Council, Montgomery County Planning Department, M-NCPPC, and others with money or services.

3 awards: Artist Eric B. Ricks and Margaret Rifkin accepting Spiros Komis

5) WUDAC Business Leader of the Year: Lene Tsegave of Kefa Café

Kefa Café in the Wheaton Library and Recreation Center is committed to fueling the community through coffee. Lene Tsegaye runs a family-owned and operated café that takes pride in providing the best coffee and a wide variety of tea options, as well as pastries, sandwiches and pupusas. They provide an oasis of comfort and community, where people can come together to connect and share a cup of coffee. Lene Tsegaye believes that great coffee can bring people from all walks of life together to enjoy a moment of joy and connection as they experience the warmth of Kefa Café.

Lene gives back to the community through her many activities including as a Board member of Shephard's Table, celebrating their 25th anniversary, as well as her advocacy for small businesses and Fenton Village in Silver Spring. During Early Voting, Lene is kind enough to open earlier to help support our volunteer election judges and workers. WUDAC is excited that Lene has brought her vibrant energy and business expertise to the Wheaton community.

6) The 4th District Police Public Safety Officer of the Year Award Corporal David Schramm

While still a PO3, Cpl Schramm contributed greatly to curbing the fentanyl epidemic being experienced throughout the Wheaton/Glenmont area. Cpl Schramm's efforts began early in the year where he took the lead on an investigation into a house identified as a source of fentanyl distribution. This investigation culminated in the service of two residential search warrants, which resulted in the seizure of over 1000 pills, a large amount of US currency, and 2 firearms.

Additionally, Cpl Schramm has dedicated an untold number of hours, both on-duty and off-duty, to conducting proactive criminal enforcement in the Wheaton CBD, and to selflessly assisting other members of his team in developing their cases. All together Cpl Schramm has directly or indirectly contributed to the seizing of nearly 5000 fentanyl tablets and 13 Firearms. These efforts have saved an untold number of lives and severely hampered the ability to distribute these substances.

7) The Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad Public Safety Award Master Firefighter Zachary Fergusson-Williams

Zach joined the Squad in April 2016, and completed initial training in one year (an amazing accomplishment), and immediately began advanced training. He was promoted to Firefighter II in January 2018; Firefighter III in January 2020; and Master Firefighter in May 2022. He currently serves as the Assistant Officer in Charge of the Tuesday crew. MFF Fergusson-Williams provides an average of 1,350 hours of service annually to our community on the heavy rescue squad and ambulances. In addition to his service on frontline responses as a firefighter/rescuer and emergency medical clinician, he manages the staff on the Tuesday duty crew; serves on the WVRS Membership Committee as a recruiter; and manages the training of our new recruits.

8) The Kensington Volunteer Fire Dept Public Safety Officer of the Year Award Lieutenant David Breitman

Lt. Breitman serves on the KVFD Board of Directors as Treasurer, and he staffs two shifts (one as Shift Officer, the other as an Engine Driver). He recently became a Paramedic, which adds to his long list of Firefighting and EMS certifications. He has never wavered and has been an incredible contributor to KVFD in 2023. Now due to his dedication for service, Lt. Breitman was recently hired by Carroll County Department of Fire and EMS of Maryland.

9) The Chamber Member of the Year Award Henry Molina, Lafayette Federal Credit Union

Given in recognition of his significant service to the community as a strong leader, a successful Vice President of Business Development of Lafayette Federal Credit Union, a Board member of the WK Chamber and the HCCMC, and involved in several other chambers & business enterprises. Originally hailing from Nicaragua, Mr. Molina immigrated to the U.S. in 2001 to pursue a BA in business administration. Following graduation, he embarked on a dynamic career path, starting at Lafayette FCU as a Member Service Representative and progressing through positions with increasing responsibilities. His journey led him to Bank of America, where he excelled as a Banking Center Manager II in the DC and PG Markets, all while pursuing a Masters in business administration, and eventually a Masters in science project management. A stint as a Multi-Site Business Branch Banker at Capital One further enriched his expertise. Henry eventually returned to Lafayette, assuming the role of Branch Manager and later Vice President of Business Development, a position he has held for over six years. His dedication extends to philanthropy, including fundraising for the Children's Miracle Network, aligning with his advocacy for promoting financial literacy. Currently pursuing certification in Business Development for CUNA Mutual, Henry continues to demonstrate his dedication to the financial services industry's growth and development.

10) The Chamber Business of the Year Award Ledo Pizza Wheaton

The Business of the Year Award to Ledo Pizza Wheaton given in recognition of the significant community contributions and quality food and service that has made Ledos a staple in the community. Ledo Pizza in Wheaton first opened on September 21, 1997. It was originally managed by Dinesh & Devyani Sheth, immigrants from India who saw an opportunity to provide for their family through small business. As long-time fans of Ledo Pizza themselves, the Sheth's brought Maryland's favorite pizza to the Wheaton & Kensington community in the same building as the original Jerry's Subs. Since their retirement several years ago, the Sheth's passed the management and operations over to their sons Sam & Jigar, who continue to manage Ledo Wheaton with the same simple recipe for success: high quality food and excellent customer service. Beyond serving great pizza, Ledo Wheaton also gives back to the community by supporting schools, nonprofits, and many other organizations through fundraisers and donations. A small business can only be successful if it has the support of the local community, and the Sheth's are proud and grateful that Ledo Wheaton has been an integral part of the Wheaton & Kensington community for two and a half decades.

11) The Chamber President's Special Award Dan Thompson, Wheaton Arts Parade

The Chamber Special President's Award is awarded to Dan Thompson in recognition of his dedicated and outstanding service in creating and spearheading the Wheaton Arts Parade & Festival each year since 2017. Originally inspired by the Philadelphia Mummers Parade and other arts parades, Dan has been bringing the community together with art, showcasing local artists and Wheaton's diverse cultures. He also founded the Wheaton Arts Parade Gallery in Westfield Wheaton Mall, and has been encouraging and arranging for artists to participate in pop-up art demonstrations at events such as Taste of Wheaton, the Kensington Day of the Book Festival, along with Paige Friedeman.

Dan has been a volunteer with his time all of his adult life – with the Boy Scouts and Little League, his church, running youth sports activities, the PTA. So it was natural for him to have volunteered his time and organizational skills on this arts project that he feels so passionate about. However he now feels like it is time to pass the torch, but worries the flame might go out; his replacement will be hard to come by. The Chamber appreciates Dan's love and commitment to Wheaton – he is always working on ways to improve the area with art.