

Maritime Aquarium Named Finalist for National Medal for Museum and Library Service

Author : David Gurliacci

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The Institute of Museum and Library Services announced today that The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk is among 30 finalists for the 2021 National Medal for Museum and Library Service.

The Maritime Aquarium is the only aquarium in the U.S. selected as a finalist this year, and one of only two institutions — along with the Ferguson Library in Stamford — named in Connecticut.

— an announcement from the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) and the [Maritime Aquarium](#)

The National Medal is the nation’s highest honor for museums and libraries that demonstrate significant impact in their communities. For more than 25 years, the award has honored institutions that demonstrate excellence in service to their communities. Six National Medal winners will be announced in May.

IMLS Director Crosby Kemper said the 2021 awards have added significance this year.

“The revival and reinstatement of the National Medals by IMLS is another signal of recovery and renewal in the nation’s very challenging — but very hopeful — times,” Kemper said.

“We are celebrating not only the ongoing excellence of the best of our museums and libraries, but their extraordinary efforts through the pandemic, the recession, the racial justice protests, and national divisions to serve, heal, and bring together our communities. Congratulations to all 30 finalists.”

Jason Patlis, president and CEO of The Maritime Aquarium, said being named as a finalist for the IMLS National Medal is a tremendous honor.

“This is a gratifying affirmation of the uniquely important role that The Maritime Aquarium plays in Norwalk and the larger community,” Patlis said.

“It’s not just the reach we have within the community, with nearly 500,000 guests and 80,000 students during a normal year, but it also is the impact the Aquarium has on our community, especially those in need through our scholarships and outreach.

“Our immersive exhibits, extensive educational programs and leading conservation initiatives connect our community — including those who do not have the means on their own — to Long Island Sound, its wildlife and habitats, and to the maritime heritage and culture that define our community.

“To be recognized this year in particular, in the midst of a pandemic that challenged our very survival and required us to completely rethink how we fulfill our mission, is a testament to the resolve and resilience of the team here at the Aquarium,” Patlis added.

To celebrate The Maritime Aquarium being named as a finalist, IMLS is encouraging the Aquarium’s community members to share stories, memories, pictures, and videos on social media as part of the Share Your Story campaign, using the #IMLSmedals hashtag, and engage with IMLS on Facebook and Twitter.

The Maritime Aquarium will be the featured finalist on Tuesday, April 27. For more information, please visit the IMLS website.

Representatives from the six winning institutions will be honored for their extraordinary contributions during a virtual National Medal Ceremony this summer.

Recent Connecticut winners include the New Haven Free Public Library in 2019, the Otis Library in Norwich in 2016 and Mystic Aquarium in 2014.

The Maritime Aquarium was nominated for the 2021 award by U.S. Rep. Jim Himes, and its application included letters of support from Himes; U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal; U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy; Tina Henckel, director of STEM education for Norwalk Public Schools; and Tammy Papa, director of Youth Services and the Lighthouse Program for youths in Bridgeport.

The 30 finalists for the honor are:

Libraries

- Cabell County Public Library (Huntington, WV)
- Chapel Hill Public Library (Chapel Hill, NC)
- Dakota County Library (Eagan, MN)
- Gwinnett County Public Library (Lawrenceville, GA)
- Haines Borough Public Library (Haines, AK)
- Highwood Public Library (Highwood, IL)
- Kenosha Public Library (Kenosha, WI)
- Long Branch Free Public Library (Long Branch, NJ)
- Marathon Public Library (Marathon, TX)
- Memphis Public Library and Information Center (Memphis, TN)
- North Las Vegas Library District (North Las Vegas, NV)
- Queens Public Library Langston Hughes (Corona, NY)
- Redwood City Public Library (Redwood City, CA)
- **The Ferguson Library (Stamford, CT)**
- West Warwick Public Library (West Warwick, RI)

Museums

- Asheville Art Museum (Asheville, NC)
- Brookfield Zoo (Brookfield, IL)
- Cincinnati Art Museum (Cincinnati, OH)
- Center of Science and Industry (COSI) (Columbus, OH)
- Great Lakes Science Center (Cleveland, OH)
- High Desert Museum (Bend, OR)
- Museo de Arte de Ponce (Ponce, Puerto Rico)
- **The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk (Norwalk, CT)**
- Mississippi Children's Museum (Jackson, MS)
- New-York Historical Society (New York, NY)
- Orlando Science Center (Orlando, FL)
- Queens Museum of Art (Corona, NY)
- Taubman Museum of Fine Art (Roanoke, VA)
- Thomas Cole Historic House (Catskill, NY)
- Virginia Museum of Natural History (Martinsville, VA)

About the Institute of Museum and Library Services

The [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) is the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums.

We advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grant-making, research, and policy development.

Our vision is a nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and

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communities. To learn more, visit www.imls.gov and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

About the Maritime Aquarium

The [Maritime Aquarium](#) at Norwalk is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to educate visitors about — and to create stewards for — Long Island Sound and the ocean beyond.

It accomplishes this by allowing visitors to get close to more than 300 species native to the Sound and its watershed, including sharks, seals, sea turtles, river otters and jellyfish.

One of the top places for family fun in Connecticut, the Aquarium also features a new multipurpose 4D movie theater, hands-on educational programs — including a slate of live online distance-learning programs for schools — as well as public cruises out onto the Sound aboard the nation's first hybrid-electric research vessel.