



CITY OF MERCER ISLAND COMMUNITY MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENTS

2023

The 2023 recipients are **Doris and James Cassan** and **Cantor Bradlee Kurland**. Both James Cassan and Cantor Bradlee Kurland passed away in 2023. Doris Cassan and her family and the Kurland family received the awards posthumously for Mr. Cassan and Cantor Kurland.

Doris and James have a long history of community involvement on Mercer Island since moving to the Island in 1967. Doris and James give back to the Mercer Island community through volunteer work, big-hearted donations, and sponsorships for a multitude of organizations and events. Doris served on the YFS Advisory Board for many years and the City is especially thankful for the Cassan's consistent and generous support of the MIYFS Foundation which directly supports the Youth and Family Services Department.

Cantor Bradlee Kurland had a long history of community involvement on Mercer Island as the cantor and music director for Herzl-Ner Tamid Conservative Congregation from 1984 to up until his passing in 2023. During his 39 years at Herzl-Ner Tamid, he officiated at countless life cycle events for congregants, - including weddings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, baby namings and funerals. Cantor Kurland continued to give back to the Mercer Island Community by freely practicing the Jewish custom of hachnasat orchim (welcoming guests) at every opportunity.

2022

The 2022 recipient is **Lola Deane**, for her long-time and wide-reaching support for the Mercer Island Community. She was a Mercer Island resident from 1957 - 1985, and during that time, she was the original owner of Island Books, helped found the Mercer Island Community Fund, helped launch the City's Youth and Family Services Department, and was active in the development of Dragon Park alongside her husband, which was later renamed Deane's Children's Park. Deane later returned to Mercer Island in 2019 and continues her lifelong passion for volunteering, currently with the Mercer Island Thrift Shop three days a week.

2021

The 2021 recipient is **Avi Schiffman**, for his efforts to make data on COVID-19 easily accessible to the global community. Avi built the nCoV2019.live website while he was a student at Mercer Island High School, which became one of the most popular information hubs tracking COVID-19 cases around the world. He spent countless hours working on the website and ensuring the information was accurate and current. He also turned down offers from advertisers to ensure nCoV2019.live remained ad-free and unbiased.

Avi is a champion for the web as a free source of information and data and he has continued to create sites that track and provide information. One of his recent projects is a collaboration on the Ukraine Take Shelter website, which connects Ukrainian refugees

with potential hosts in neighboring countries. Avi hopes his work is an inspiration to other young people and shows that they too can make a difference. Through Avi's innovation and drive to problem solve, he has positively impacted the global community.

2020

The 2020 recipient is the **Mercer Island Community Fund (MICF)**. MICF exemplifies the very best of our community. When the adverse impact of the Pandemic was gripping our community along with the rest of the world, the MICF Board of Directors was among the first to step up to organize the community and to help those most hurt by the Pandemic. MICF showed the love that we need to have for each other especially during challenging times and illustrated the resiliency of our community. MICF led the way in collaboration with other groups in organizing and launching the WeLoveMI COVID Relief Campaign. This campaign continues today and has raised over \$260,000 for small businesses on the Island, and nonprofit organizations on the Island.

MICF was incorporated in 1985. In the past 35 years, it has raised over a million dollars for grants to community organizations that are involved in the arts, environment, community development, recreation, social services, education, and health. Led by an all-volunteer Board of Directors, who are Mercer Island residents, MICF allows Islanders to invest in a healthy and vibrant community to improve the quality of life on Mercer Island.

2019

The 2019 recipients are **David and Kendra Uhler**, who have gone above and beyond to make the Mercer Island community a great place to live. They accepted their award online during the July 21 (2020) Council Meeting, held by video conference due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Not only have the Uhler's given their own time and talent in 2019, but they have also been instrumental in coordinating a variety of all-volunteer efforts in response to the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. David has led City volunteers in responding to calls of service from our most vulnerable residents, distributing masks to every citizen in need, and assisting the Youth and Family Services Department with donations management. The Uhlers volunteered more than 500 hours during the Pandemic alone and are truly committed to the Mercer Island community - the depth and consistency of their support for all of their neighbors is commendable and deeply appreciated.

2018

The 2018 recipients are **Lisa and Rino Caruccio**, who have been greatly involved in the community since becoming residents in 2006, and who opened a unique state-of-the-art culinary event center (Caruccio's) in the Town Center in 2017 to expand their community support and involvement. Their children went through the Mercer Island Schools and have been involved in the City's VOICE service program, National Charity League, and high school sports. The Caruccio's are St. Monica parishioners, regular donors to Mercer Island Youth and Family Services, and key donors to the Mercer Island Schools Foundation.

Through their event center, Lisa and Rino are happy to nurture the community and

encourage people to build relationships and treasure them. For example, they employ Fare Start employees, helping people with barriers to employment get the skills they need for a real career; prepare and donate 20 full Thanksgiving meals for Mercer Island Youth and Family Services; support local youth and schools by offering a special rate for school organizations; create an inviting space for “Celebration of Life” events on the island; and host the popular Wine Wednesday event, bringing 150-200 people together for food, wine, and live music at community tables. Lisa and Rino also take special care and interest in their senior friends across the street at the Aljoia retirement community, know them by name, and make sure they always feel treated like royalty. The Caruccio’s are truly passionate about and committed to the Mercer Island community - the breadth and depth of their support for the people and the culture on this Island is commendable and deeply appreciated.

2017

The 2017 recipients are **Laurie and Victor Raisys**, who have made a significant impact on the community as residents and as owners of Island Books. As third generation Islanders, Laurie and Victor bought Island Books in July of 2015 after careers at Microsoft and have worked diligently to preserve the sense of community found at the bookstore and enhance this local legacy ever since.

Supporting the Mercer Island community and giving back to local organizations is second nature to Laurie and Victor. They have sponsored special events like the Mercer Island Youth and Family Services Giving From The Heart Breakfast & Shopping Day, the Mercer Island Schools Foundation Breakfast, the Farmers Market, Summer Celebration, and supported the local business community through the Mercer Island Chamber of Commerce, where Victor is a board member.

2016

At the June 5, 2017 Council Meeting, the Council named **Terry Moreman** as 2016 Citizen of the Year. She has advocated for Mercer Island residents big and small. She has appeared at numerous City Council meetings and served on countless boards and committees. She has influenced the decision-making process on everything from school functions to Town Center's revitalization.

Terry is a 38-year Island resident and served as the Executive Director of the Mercer Island Chamber of Commerce for over 25 years, producing well-received events like Town Center trick-or-treating and Art UnCorked. In addition to building a strong and respected business core in Mercer Island, she has also played a significant role in the success of so many organizations: Historical Society, Sister City Association, Farmers Market, Boys and Girls Club, PTA, Mercer Island Preschool Association, Community Fund, and the Mercer Island Schools Foundation.

2015

At the July 5, 2015 Council Meeting, the Council honored **Nancy Stewart** as the 2015 Citizen of the Year. Nancy Stewart moved to Mercer Island in 1981, with her husband Judge Wayne Stewart, and has used music and songwriting to build local community and bring generations together ever since. She’s known for enthusiastic appearances at all

manner of Island festivals and events, in the library, the local bookstore, and City's community center. Her Sing With Our Kids program began as a pilot project on Mercer Island in 2012, in which she created, tested, and documented singing events that foster early learning and literacy, while connecting children to their surroundings. Her program goal has always been to create a national model that any school, library, family or community can use – free of cost.

Nancy explains her passion: “Musicians don’t choose to become musicians. It’s what they are. What they are born to be. Music chooses them. It’s not about money; it’s about loving music. It’s about getting to share something that they love more than themselves.”

2014

Council selected **Roger and Nancy Page** -owners of Island Books- as 2014 Citizens of the Year. Founded in 1973 by Lola Deane, Island Books was already a beloved fixture in the community when Roger Page came to work there as a part-time Christmas gift wrapper in 1984. Intrigued by the business, Roger was soon promoted to bookseller, then floor manager, and in 1991 he offered to buy the store. The Pages' business and personal goal is to serve the community in a welcoming and caring manner, which includes hosting special events and countless fundraisers over the years. Many Islanders, for example, will recall the 2,000 midnight attendees at a Harry Potter release, with bookstore staff in costume. To date, the Pages have raised more than \$300,000 in donations to a variety of community causes, are widely known by many Islanders.

2013

This year, the Council selected **Mercer Island Preschool Association (MIPA)** as 2013 Citizen of the Year. Founded in the 1920's, MIPA was one of the first community groups to organize on the Island and has maintained an enduring focus on education and advocacy, community building and parks. As a group of volunteers, its guiding principle is an unswerving commitment to the education and well-being of children from birth through Kindergarten, often working in conjunction with the City. For example, in partnership with the City's Youth and Family Services Department, MIPA provides funding for pre-school scholarships for families in need; and with the City's assistance, MIPA supports emergency preparedness in the preschools. And annually MIPA recognizes an outstanding preschool teacher via its Exceptional Educator award. In October 2013, the City opened a very special, ADA-accessible, remodeled playground at Luther Burbank Park which celebrates the importance of play for children of all physical abilities: MIPA provided design assistance and almost \$100,000 in donations toward the project. In its 80+ years of existence, MIPA has been a tremendous contributor to the sense of community all Islanders enjoy, and fully deserves this honor.

2012

The City Council selected **Fran Call** as 2012 Citizen of the Year in honor of her extensive service to the community. For 26 years Ms. Call taught English, history and outdoor fitness at the Junior High and Middle Schools on the Island and is known for her motivational talents and no-nonsense but caring nature. Always an outdoor enthusiast, she developed a legendary outdoor fitness program, a "*P.E. Plus*" class, that had kids running, bicycling, hiking, canoeing, and learning survival skills. Motivated students could

even join an annual self-supported bike ride led by Ms. Call to various destinations across the country. Since her retirement 20 years ago, Fran hasn't even considered slowing down, instead starting a walking group for people over 55, offered through the Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Department.

2011

The City Council presented the 2011 Citizen of the Year award to **Dr. Michael Copass**. He is one of the founding fathers of the Medic One Program – a medical system that Medical Professionals worldwide continue to study and emulate. For thirty-five years, he was the Director of Emergency Services for Harborview Medical Center – the only Level 1 Trauma Center in a five-state region. He continues to be the Medical Director of Medic One for the Seattle Fire Dept, and the UW Paramedic Training program which trains ALL of the paramedics in Seattle and King County. Dr. Copass founded Airlift Northwest in 1982, a nonprofit air ambulance service that is unrivaled anywhere in the United States and is responsible for saving thousands of lives. Dr. Michael Copass is a legend in the Fire and EMS community. He has demanded excellence from those that have worked for him or in his programs. His work ethic and devotion to patients is legendary. No single person has done more for the health of this community than Dr. Copass.

2010

The City Council chose **Susan Kaplan and Terry Pottmeyer** as the 2010 Citizens of the Year for their decades of selfless service to the Mercer Island community. Susan and Terry chaired the Mercerversary 50 Committee in 2010 and helped provide a wonderful celebration that acknowledged the past and welcomed the future. Months of preparation, planning, and effort went into creating the anniversary event. A website was created to post stories and lists of longtime residents, a brief history of the Island, and celebration events. A hugely successful birthday party was planned with special recognitions of 80+ year residents and welcomes extended to those who had just arrived. Cakes were cut, candles blown out, and many recognitions were given to those instrumental in the development of Mercer Island as a City.

Susan and Terry have both been active in PTA at every level, from the Preschool Association to the Mercer Island High School and received recognition and numerous awards for their work. They have both been board members and the President of Mercer Island Schools Foundation, the Mercer Island School Board, and the Mercer Island Community Fund. They have been members of the Committee for Mercer Island Public Schools (CIMPS) and the committee to raise money for the new Mercer Island High School Band uniforms. Susan and Terry have both been involved in the MIYFS Foundation and the Mercer Island Youth & Family Services Giving from the Heart Breakfast steering committee. Both Susan and Terry work to build a strong community. They make community connections, start, and follow through with new initiatives, and have given countless hours and selfless acts to the betterment of our community.

2009

The City Council presented the 2009 Citizen of the Year award to **Blair Rasmussen**, executive director of the Mercer Island Boys & Girls Club and former NBA player, in honor of his service to the community's children and families. The award recognizes

Rasmussen's leadership as executive director of the Mercer Island Boys & Girls Club, where he spearheaded the development and construction of the PEAK youth facility. The 41,300-square-foot PEAK facility will house the new Mercer Island Boys Girls Club, a teen center, infant and childcare centers, and a multi-sport field house. The \$15 million facility opened in August 2010. Prior to heading the PEAK project, Rasmussen helped lead the remodel of St. Monica's, sat on the board of the Boys and Girls Club, and coached a number of Island youth sports teams. A 15-year resident of the Island, Rasmussen and his wife, Sarah, have five children, Christine, Sam, Sabrina, Joe, and Jack.

2008

The 2008 Citizen of the Year Award honors not one, but dozens of Island residents. On Monday, July 6, 2009 the Mercer Island City Council announced "**the organizers and volunteers of the inaugural 2008 Mercer Island Farmers Market**" as the much-anticipated Citizen of the Year. This group was recognized for their contributions to providing a vibrant community setting that offers fresh, locally grown foods, promotes and supports sustainable agriculture, and connects residents to each other and to local farmers. The Mercer Island Farmers Market enables residents to purchase local food from local farmers and in doing so, contribute to the local economy.

2007

"Tonight we honor a fixture in our community who has been involved in almost everything for decades," said Mayor Jim Pearman in naming **Jim Trombold** the 2007 Citizen of the Year on June 16, 2008. In addition to being a respected physician and Rotarian, Trombold was a community activist, environmentalist, and defender of Mercer Island parks.

Jim was a Rotarian who served as president from 2005 to 2006, the chair of the Planet Earth committee, an avid lover and defender of the Mercer Island parks system. He fought to preserve and improve Mercerdale Park, including the establishment of a group native garden. He helped set up the display of crosses at Mercerdale Field by Vietnam Veterans against the war in Iraq. In 2005-06, when he was president of MI Rotary, he helped expand support for the Half-Marathon to raise money for colon cancer awareness.

2006

Longtime Mercer Island residents, **Margaret and Kenneth Quarles** were chosen as the 2006 Citizen of the Year for their generous and selfless contribution to the City's park and open space system this year. The Quarles' were the owners of pristine open space located west of East Mercer Way and adjacent to Pioneer Park. In 2006, the Quarles agreed to transfer this rare open space property consisting of nearly 7 acres to the City of Mercer Island in order to preserve this property for park and recreation purposes.

This significant gift to the City will serve as a lasting legacy to the family's strong ties to the Mercer Island community and represents their strong desire to preserve the property from potential future development while providing recreational trail opportunities for future generations.

2005

The City Council chose **Ben Wolfe** as the 2005 Citizen of the Year. Ben was hired by the Mercer Island School District in 1963. For his first two years he taught French. In 1965 he was appointed as the Vice Principal of North Mercer Junior High. He worked in that position until 1980. During his time at North Mercer Junior High, Ben was in charge of much of the disciplinary process, as the Vice Principal. He was a very stern administrator as far as following the rules and the law. Ben developed a very close working relationship with the police and fire departments during this time. His quick wit and outstanding personality were always a hit.

Ben used to refer to himself as the “Captain of the North Precinct” because he felt as if he was the cop in the school for us at the Junior High School. Soon this nickname spread, and Ben was proud of this nickname. Ben would call the department and say this is Captain Wolfe from the North Precinct and I have one in custody for you. In 1980 Ben was appointed as the Director of Maintenance Operations for the Mercer Island School District. He worked in this capacity until he retired in June of 1992. Ben had 36 total years of working in the field of education, 29 of which were with Mercer Island. Ben made several trips to Europe and enjoyed talking about his experiences there. A good joke or war story usually started the meetings he attended serving as a citizen volunteer on the City’s Police and Fire Disability Board. Ben served 15 years and was the Board Chairman for many years.

2004

He’s been called the godfather of Puget Sound transportation and credited with coining the phrase “we don't want to hear it, see it or smell it” as a condition of Interstate 90's expansion across the Island. His colleagues have said that “He's flunked retirement several times”, with a career in public service that has spanned six decades **Aubrey Davis** is honored with the 2004 Citizen of the Year Award.

Aubrey first moved to Mercer Island in 1960 and was elected to the Mercer Island City Council in 1968, remaining on the Council until 1978. He served as mayor for two terms from 1970 to 1973. Throughout the years since leaving the Mercer Island City Council, he has headed the regional office of the U.S. Department of Transportation and has led the federal Urban Mass Transit Administration.

He served 32 years on the Group Health Board of Trustees, including eight terms as chair and in 1988, was named president and CEO of Group Health a position he held for four years. Aubrey retired after serving more than 12 years on the Washington State Transportation Commission and remained active on the transportation committee at the Puget Sound Regional Council and on the committee reviewing the options for replacement of the Highway 520 Bridge. He also served on the Citizens’ Oversight Panel monitoring Sound Transit.

2003

City Council members honored **Myra Lupton** for being an involved citizen in every sense of the word. She was complimented for being an independent thinker. Mayor Alan Merkle said. “She is one person who has been able to praise and criticize in one breath, and we

feel good about both.” Ms. Lupton retired from teaching English in January 1992 after 31 years with the Bellevue School District. She has been active in numerous civic committees on Mercer Island, including the local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

2002

Jan Deveny was chosen as Citizen of the Year for 2002 in recognition of his 28 years of service as Mercer Island’s Public Safety Director. His law enforcement career spanned almost 40 years, during which he was President of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs and active in the International Association of Chief of Police. He was a tireless supporter of Special Olympics and co-founded the Washington Law Enforcement Torch Run.

2001

The 2001 Citizen of the Year was **Eugene Ferguson**. Eugene “Gene” Ferguson received the Council’s appreciation for his 25 years of service to the children and families of Mercer Island. As Band Director and long-time music educator, Eugene worked tirelessly to introduce music into the lives of thousands of Mercer Island students. He made great contributions to the success of the music program in the Mercer Island School District bringing it national, state, and local acclaim.

2000

Don Cohen received the 2000 Citizen of the Year award for his decade of service on the Mercer Island Planning Commission. Having served as its Chairman for four years, Don contributed to the development of many important pieces of land use legislation including the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan, Critical Lands Ordinance, Mega-House Ordinance, and the Unified Land Development Code. Don garnered respect for his experience, sense of fairness, environmental advocacy, leadership, and legal knowledge.

1999

For the second year in a row, the Citizen of the Year award went to a large group -- the **Aircraft Noise Abatement Committee**. This group of over 260 citizens vigilantly opposed operational and policy changes proposed by the Federal Aviation Administration that would cause increased aircraft noise over Mercer Island. Committee members: **Ira Appelman, Charlie Barb, Jim Gilchrist, Carol Heltzel, Tom Heltzel, Lorelei Herres, Tom Hildebrandt, Elizabeth Huber, Françoise Martin, Maxine Misselwitz, Ted Misselwitz, Phil Ohringer, Fran Ohringer, Kevin Peck, Sue Stewart, and Nick Vedder.**

1998

The Clergy Association was chosen because the Council was so appreciative of their overwhelming support and advocacy for affordable housing. This group was not used to taking political or public stands and yet became a moving force in our community. Their support culminated in the purchase of Ellsworth House in 1999. They also had developed a chaplain support group for the Public Safety Department. Association members: **Bill Clements, Woody Carlson, Paul Fauske, Wynton Dunford, David Rose, Lisa Gelber, Richard Johnson, John Bowman, Carla Berkedal, Randal Gardner, Jack Olive, Eric Newberg, Jeff Holland, Michael Bush, Frederic Harder, Susan Price, Dale Sewall, Jean**

Davis, John Fellows, Kimbrough Besheer, and Marlow Schoop.

1997

Pat Braman was active for many years as a teacher and union activist. But her nomination came from a year of devoting personal time to bring the Youth Asset training to Mercer Island Schools. This program was part of another position she held as the City's only representative on the Community Network of Mid-East King County. These Networks were formed by the legislature to meet the challenge of increasing youth violence and teen pregnancy. Pat's work on both these projects took time and energy to find funds from the private sector and to advocate for people in the community to get trained to be more supportive of kids.

1996

Faye Whitney was honored for her 20 years of service to seniors and youth on Mercer Island. She had just completed Blossoms and Burgers, an event that partners the seniors at the Parks and Recreation Department with the Crest Learning Center. She helped start and run this event for many years. She also is active in the Council on Aging and Meals on Wheels program. She volunteered at the Mercer Island Thrift shop since 1978, raising funds for Youth and Family Services.

1995

The year that **John Steding** died, we realized that he had given many years of service to our community and that the Council had not yet recognized someone who was active in the schools. With this in mind, the Council posthumously awarded John Steding its Citizen of the Year. John was the keeper of the statistics for most sports at Mercer Island High School.

1994

Pam Eakes was chosen this year because of her national activities for Mothers Against Violence in America (MAVIA). In the year that she started this organization, it had grown to 30 chapters across the state. This organization has grown nationally and has also created a school-based group called Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE).

1993

By 1993, the Council felt that rules of how and why we chose a Citizen of the Year would be helpful. At that time, we felt that we wished to make the award fun and meaningful to us all. We agreed to a set of criteria that would guide the Council in its selection of its Citizen of the Year.

That year there were two nominations of people who had similar activities and were of similar advanced age. Instead of waiting for another year, we agreed to honor them both. **Anna Matheson** was very active in starting and maintaining the Council on Aging. This group had advocated for seniors and had been instrumental in starting Meals on Wheels, transportation for seniors by volunteers, and many other senior support activities. **Delores Erchinger** was volunteer extraordinaire for the Chamber of Commerce. She often called every business member to remind them of the monthly Chamber Meetings and worked

countless hours answering the phones there. She further volunteered at the Council on Aging and helped start the Historical Society.

1992

The third year the Fire Department brought the Council the name of an unsung hero that they wished to see honored – **Dr. Floyd Short**. He was the trainer for all the firefighters to become emergency medical technicians (EMT). He created the first trained EMTs who were able to provide first response before the Medic One arrived. When Hunter Simpson, then president of Physio-Control donated a defibrillator to the Mercer Island Fire Department, Dr. Short began training fire fighters in its use. His experiment got him a 20-year volunteer position as trainer.

1991

The second year, the Council decided to pick a member of the community who had been active in many different ways. They chose **John Nelson** because he had served as founding member and president of the Arts Council, was a member at large for the Youth and Family Services Board, was active starting and running the Rotary Marathon, volunteered to be a starter at the annual all school track meet, was on the Community Fund board and as such had acted as auctioneer at various auctions. He also was very active in Mercerversery, the occasion of the 25th year since the City of Mercer Island incorporated. Whenever there was a task for volunteers, John was there helping. John ran for City Council in 1994 and won. He served four years before stepping down to become a Regional Governor for Rotary.

1990

The first citizen of the year was **Barbara Swier**. She was thanked by the Council for organizing daffodil bulb planting in Mercer Island's Central Business District. She had single-handedly organized volunteers to plant the Town Center with bulbs to make a great splash of color in the spring. Her work was done with little help from the City and was much appreciated. Since the Council did not have a citizen of the year award at that time, the Council recognized her at a regular meeting.

That same year, the Council also thanked **Phil Flash** for organizing a volunteer litter patrol along the sides of roads. He demonstrated his further commitment to Mercer Island as Santa at the Merchant's Munch, as a member of the Historical Society and participant on many community occasions.