

MEDIA RELEASE

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Lucille Walker Honored with the Maryland Tourism Visionary Impact Award

Hughesville, MD – Lucille W. Walker, Executive Director, was the recipient of the 2022 Visionary Impact Award during the 41st Annual Maryland Tourism & Travel Summit in Ocean City, Maryland, on November 16, 2022. This prestigious award recognizes exceptional vision within the tourism industry in the State of Maryland and has been awarded to Ms. Walker for her vision of Southern Maryland becoming a National Heritage Area.

“I am honored by this recognition from the Maryland Tourism Council,” said Lucille Walker, “and it honors all those working so hard towards Southern Maryland becoming the newest National Heritage Area in the United States. The story of this region informs our nation’s story in vital ways, and this award is a wonderful tribute.”

As Executive Director of the Southern Maryland Heritage Area, she has tripled the organization’s funding, and as Chair of the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition and Legislative Lead, she assisted in doubling the state funding for the Maryland Heritage Area program from \$3 million to \$6 million. Walker presented the National Heritage Area idea throughout the region and the state, speaking on the power of place in heritage tourism and why Southern Maryland informs the nation’s story. She was able to bring together diverse groups and organizations and form significant regional partnerships, as well as secure funding for mandatory national requirements, such as a National Heritage Area Feasibility Study. Working with federal, state, and local legislators, Walker was able to assist the bi-partisan initiative in moving forward towards authorizing legislation. Becoming a national heritage area requires an Act of Congress and The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act (H.R. 2024) sponsored by Congressman Steny Hoyer, passed through the United States House of Representatives in September, and The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act (S. 825) sponsored by Senator Ben Cardin with support from Senator Van Hollen is currently pending a vote in the United States Senate.

Becoming a national heritage area will raise the national profile and boost tourism potential for the region. Southern Maryland is where, for the first time in the Western World, that any type of religious freedom was put into law, establishing a basic international human right. It is where the first person of African descent ever served in a legislature in America, Mathias de Sousa, 1642, and where the first woman ever petitioned for the right to vote, Margaret Brent, 1649. Southern Maryland includes the National Marine Sanctuary of Mallows Bay, a number of national trails; it is where the first Astronauts trained, and includes rich agricultural and maritime histories and heritage. Southern Maryland continues to be a region of remarkable innovation with strong ties to the defense of the nation. Two pillars of the national heritage area initiative are the First People (the Piscataway Conoy Tribe) and African American experiences. “Ultimately,” Walker said “we are talking about survival and the human spirit, and that is a story worth telling.”

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Destination Southern Maryland is the public face of the Southern Maryland Heritage Area. This state-based heritage area is one of the 13 Heritage Areas in Maryland and was founded in 2003. This organization represents Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties. Destination Southern Maryland is the heritage tourism entity for Southern Maryland with a mission to enhance the region through innovative heritage tourism experiences, comprehensive cultural and natural resource conservation, and excellence in educational opportunities. This organization assists Southern Maryland with economic development and works directly with the tourism entities in each of the three counties, as well as providing grants, building partnerships, and promoting regional identity. To learn more about Destination Southern Maryland, [visit our website](#).

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