



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BIDDEFORD, Maine (September 4, 2020)- The Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center Announces the Third Annual Biddeford Hall of Fame Award Winners

The Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center (BCHC) announces the Third Annual Biddeford Hall of Fame Award Winners for 2020, bringing attention to those who have made significant contributions to our city and/or to the world at large. The ceremony will be held on October 3rd but will not be open to the public due to COVID-19 restrictions.

After the presentation ceremony, banners honoring the recipients will be placed on the light poles in downtown Biddeford and plaques will be added to the display of past recipients found in Biddeford City Hall Council Chambers.

BCHC is pleased to be able to recognize various icons of our great City in a public place, where citizens may be reminded of the accomplishments of the award recipients. Please join us in congratulating those who have helped make our city a great place to live. BCHC wishes to thank the Selection Committee, comprised of local people who were deemed knowledgeable about the City's history and its people.

For more information or for any questions about the presentations, please contact Diane Cyr, President of the BCHC, at bchc04005@gmail.com or 283-3993.

Following is information on the five Hall of Fame Award recipients of 2020:

The Droggitis Brothers; Jimmy, Archie, Charlie and Alex were American born sons of Greek immigrants who helped sculpt the political atmosphere in Biddeford while serving a good meal at a reasonable price. In 1935, after 14 years as a shoe repair business, they converted the repair shop to a small tavern called Charlie's Café and served sandwiches and beer to mill workers and other patrons. After Archie purchased a 35' mahogany bar in Boston, the restaurant became known as The Wonderbar. A political hangout, it would become a spot for campaigning State and National candidates to stop. Besides running the restaurant, the Droggitis brothers were very active in the Greek community and Biddeford as a whole. As the Wonderbar was about to be sold in early 1982, when asked about the success of the business from a struggling shoe shine shop, Jimmy is quoted as saying "That's because Biddeford was a kind-hearted place to an immigrant Greek family 70 years ago".

Louis B. (Papa) Lausier was mayor of Biddeford for an unprecedented 15 consecutive terms from 1941 to 1955. He was a lawyer, banker and businessman, but his true love was politics. He served 2 years in the state legislature and, locally, as city alderman, city auditor and city solicitor. In 1948 he captured the Democratic nomination for Governor, one of the first Franco-Americans to run for statewide office in Maine. Lausier's personality and conduct won him friends and enemies, but one of Lausier's noteworthy achievements was leaving the City of Biddeford debt-free, one of the few cities in Maine that could make that claim in 1955. Mayor Lausier will be remembered for steadfast devotion to his party ideals and the interest he always maintained in furthering the progress of his city and state.

Israel Shevenell, at the age of 19, left his home in Compton, in the Eastern Township's region of Lower Canada (now known as Quebec) and walked nearly 200 miles to Biddeford looking for work. He found work as a brick maker, saved his money, walked back to Canada and convinced his parents to move the rest of his family to Biddeford. He was known as Biddeford's first permanent French-Canadian settler and first French voter. He built many homes that still stand today and helped organize and build St. Joseph's Church on Elm Street. Shevenell Park on Main Street recognizes his walk with a plaque and, in 2015, his great-great grandson Ray Shevenell, celebrated the 170th anniversary of the walk by recreating the journey.

Benjamin Stern was born in Kovne, Lithuania on July 14, 1885. After a brief period in London he arrived in Boston; peddling linoleum from a wagon, then laboring in the window-cleaning and property maintenance business he remained in that line of work in Lawrence, Massachusetts until 1920. Ben and his wife Rose felt that the humming mill town on the banks of the Saco River offered fertile ground for his start-up property maintenance business. He noted the appalling working conditions of the children, men and women in the mills and found it unacceptable. He ran for the Maine State House of Representatives and won the election as an Independent at age 45. After winning another term, Stern fought long and hard for the passage of the old age pension bill which was finally signed into law on March 31, 1933. Ben Sterns returned to Biddeford to concentrate on his family and business but will always be remembered for his courage, independence and integrity as he consistently worked to advance the causes of working men, the poor and struggled for the passage of social legislation.

George Thatcher (Thacher) was born in 1754 in Yarmouth, Massachusetts, the youngest in the family of 11 children. He was elected to the first United States Congress in 1789, a representative of the District of Maine (then a part of Massachusetts) and witnessed the inauguration of George Washington as the first president of the United States. Before he resigned in 1801, he had been elected to a seat in the United States House of Representatives for 12 years in a row- more than any other legislator in the history of Congress up to that time. During the organization of Maine's statehood in 1819, he was a member of the convention that created the new state's constitution. Thatcher and other citizens cherished their right to worship by their values and beliefs. Consequently, they left the First Parish Congressional Church on the Pool Road and started the Second Congregational Church on Crescent Street in Biddeford in 1797. As an ardent Unitarian, Thatcher helped to sponsor the creation of Bowdoin College so that Maine would have its own institution of higher education and he donated a large collection of books to its library.