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### ***NIGHT OF DISTINCTION PROGRAM COMES TO LIGONIER MUSEUM***

Ligonier – As part of the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Ligonier Valley’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, the Museum will host SAMA’s annual Night of Distinction program in April. Scheduled for Saturday, April 22, Night of Distinction is a dinner-and-awards event established to honor individuals and organizations that have made an extraordinary impact on SAMA and the arts.

At this year’s event, SAMA will present its prestigious Service to the Arts Award to Marian Morgan, while Barbara and Ed O’Brien will receive the Volunteerism Award. The program also has a Ligonier flavor, as Fort Ligonier will be presented the Award for Architectural Excellence and Westmoreland County artist Rita Haldeman is honored with the Award for Artistic Distinction. The event begins with cocktails and hors d’oeuvres in the Museum before moving to the prestigious Rolling Rock Club for dinner and awards presentation.

“Night of Distinction takes on added significance in 2017 as we recognize the contributions and talents of several awardees and highlight the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary milestone of the Ligonier Valley Museum,” said Gary Moyer, SAMA Executive Director. “SAMA-Ligonier Valley epitomizes both the artistic distinction and architectural excellence, as well as the service to the arts and community that are hallmarks of our Night of Distinction program.”

Night of Distinction is scheduled for 5 to 9 p.m. on April 22. Cost is \$95 per person. Reservations are required by April 14. For reservations or more information, please call the Loretto Museum at (814) 472-3920.

#### **Service to the Arts Award**

The Service to the Arts Award is presented to an individual who has exemplified participation, dedication and commitment to the arts, and there may be no better example of those qualities than Marian Morgan. A two-time SAMA Trustee (1990 and 2012-present), Morgan, of Johnstown, is also a former SAMA staff member, having been Public Relations and Membership Coordinator.

At SAMA, Morgan has served on the Board’s Development Committee since 2015, as well as on the Garden Party and Think Pink committees, in addition to past service as President

of the Auxiliary. Perhaps her greatest contribution, however, has been witnessed through the Gala. A committee member for several years, Morgan was Co-Chair in 1990-91 and has been Co-Chair or on the Leadership Circle since 2012, as well as a Gala Patron for the past five years. In 2013, she was appointed Chairperson of the Gala program ad campaign, and under her leadership, the campaign has exceeded its goal every year. In her first year as campaign chair, advertising revenue skyrocketed to \$12,240. Those numbers nearly doubled last year as she brought in more than \$24,000 in ads.

Her philanthropy extends beyond the Museum, however. She formerly served as President of the Auxiliary to the American College of Neuropsychiatrists and Publicity and Mental Health Chairman of Blair County Medical Society Auxiliary. She has served on the American Cancer Society's Pink Ribbon Ball committee and has done volunteer work for the American Heart Association and March of Dimes. Her remarkable photography skills have benefitted organizations such as United Homeowners of Pennsylvania; Roxbury Bandshell's Fat Friday fundraiser; the Joyce Murtha Breast Care fundraiser, "Girls Night Out;" and Johnstown Concert Ballet's DANCEWORKS fundraiser.

### **Volunteerism Award**

For anyone involved with the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Barbara and Ed O'Brien exemplify the spirit of volunteerism. The Loretto couple's steadfast commitment and tireless dedication to the arts inspire others and provide a valuable service for SAMA and the entire region. A Cambria County native, Barbara O'Brien is a retired fiscal assistant for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Cross-country skiing, gardening and quilting are among her favorite activities, as is spending time with the O'Briens' three grandchildren. For the last 25 years, she has been a key volunteer for the Museum. She is a longtime member of the Gala and Think Pink committees and is past chair of the summer Gala.

Originally from Philadelphia, Ed O'Brien came to Loretto in 1971 to attend Saint Francis University. He fell in love with the area and soon made it his home. He is founder and owner of Wicklow Fuel Co., Inc. and owns a 100-acre farm, where the couple raise sheep and provide care for aging relatives. An avid musician, O'Brien's guitar skills are frequently on display at SAMA events such as exhibition receptions and the Altoona Museum's popular Wicked Wednesday program. Since 2011 he has been a member of the Museum's Board of Trustees, where he also serves on the Acquisition and Facilities committees.

### **Award for Architectural Excellence**

Fort Ligonier was built by the British army as part of the successful Forbes Campaign of 1758 that took the French at Fort Duquesne at present-day Pittsburgh. Today, Fort Ligonier is a faithful reconstruction of the original that is based on historical and archaeological evidence. The first portions of the reconstruction opened to the public in 1954, and a museum followed in 1962.

Over the ensuing decades, the reconstructed fort, along with the museum building and its collections, have greatly expanded to the world-class museum and historic site visitors enjoy today.

Fort Ligonier will open its 2017 season on April 29 after a major expansion and renovation project. The new Fort Ligonier Center for History Education will enhance the organization's efforts to educate, entertain and enthrall the public about the historic events that took place at the Fort and throughout Western Pennsylvania. Covering 5,277 square feet, the new center will be a year-round facility offering educational programming, workshops, lectures and exhibitions. The center can accommodate 220 guests and will offer new galleries and exhibits, including a George Washington Gallery, a History Gallery, an introductory video at the entrance, and a research library and collections area. The art gallery collection was expanded to include five new paintings from artists Paul Weber and Russell Smith.

### **Award for Artistic Distinction**

For those in Westmoreland County and Western Pennsylvania, Rita Haldeman's name is synonymous with fine art. For years she has been one of the region's most prolific and highly collected artists. Her paintings capture the landscape's serene beauty with precise detail, culminating in romantic compositions that delight viewers of all ages and backgrounds.

A resident of Jeannette, Haldeman is a directory artist with SAMA and is often in the schools working with the Artist-in-Residence program. Her career is dotted with awards and accolades, among which she counts receiving the Landscape Award at the *Arts in the Parks* exhibition in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, as her greatest honor. Other major awards include First Prize at the Three Rivers Arts Festival in Pittsburgh and First Prize in the St. Vincent College Monastery Run Competition. Haldeman is a regular participant in the Loyalhanna Watershed Association's annual art auction and was selected to paint two limited edition prints for the organization, which also named her its "Environmental Citizen of the Year" in 2013. Her paintings are included in private and corporate collections throughout the United States and are represented by a number of galleries, including G-Squared Gallery in Ligonier.

The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Ligonier Valley is located at One Boucher Lane and Route 711 South in Ligonier. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 1 to 5 p.m. weekends. The Museum is a handicapped-accessible facility and is open to the public free of charge. For more information, call the Museum at (724) 238-6015 or visit [www.sama-art.org](http://www.sama-art.org).