

PRESS RELEASE

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Odenton Heritage Society Recognized for Preservation Work Receives Best of Maryland Award from Preservation Maryland

Odenton, MD (September 1, 2020) –Preservation Maryland presented members of the Odenton Heritage Society with a Best of Maryland award for their well-established commitment to preserving and promoting the town’s history and historic buildings.

The Society’s impactful work is highly visible to many Marylanders and travelers as they approach Odenton Station on the MARC and Amtrak line in Anne Arundel County. In the early 1990s, the all-volunteer organization was instrumental in saving the ca. 1917 rusticated block Citizens Bank Building and received federal transportation funds for the restoration. Now the building stands as a small satellite museum of the group and a coffee and comfort station for travelers.

In 2001 the Odenton Heritage Society changed tracks and started work on the restoration of the former Odenton Masonic Lodge 209, now known as the Old Masonic Hall. Built in 1912 the Hall served as the meeting place for the Masons of Odenton, including many members of the military from nearby Camp Meade. Under the regulations and guidance of the Maryland Historical Trust, the all-volunteer group initiated and completed repairs including electrical work, new HVAC system, new roof, and ADA compliance. In 2017 the group continued renovations including, enhancing the front entrance, removing the plywood over the windows, repairing and replacing panes, along with custom shutters which has had the biggest impact and aligned with announcing the new look of the exterior of the Odenton Heritage Society Historical Center.

Upon presenting the award to members of the Society’s board of directors, and volunteers, Preservation Maryland’s Director of Communications, Meagan Baco emphasized, “More people need to know about the history of Odenton and the amazing work and commitment of your group. It is a model for a scaled and sustainable approach to local preservation – it is exactly the type of work that Preservation Maryland is proud to elevate to the state and national level.”

The restored Old Masonic Hall now serves as a local history museum, public archives, the Heritage Society’s administrative office and a community-meeting place. The museum houses exhibits that educate visitors on how railroads have influenced the growth and development of Odenton since the 1860s. The museum features objects, period settings, photographs and AV presentations about railroad

history, railroad workers, and the town itself – homes and neighborhoods, community organizations, stores, churches, and businesses in the Historic District and surrounding areas.

The Heritage Society is led by a group of dedicated volunteers, including long-time Odenton residents who have been friends and neighbors for the majority of their lives – several members of the group are married, served as firefighters or were girl scout leaders together. Roger White, a Smithsonian employee is the Museum Director and curator. Current President of the group, Wylie Donaldson, was born and raised in what has become the Odenton Historic District.

In nominating the work of the Odenton Heritage Society, First Vice President, Greg Mazzella, wrote: “The group’s ‘Get The Job Done’ approach is only possible because of the contributions made by each member of the Heritage Society and the support of our generous members. We all believe that there is a special bond between the people and the place in our Odenton community.”

The Odenton Heritage Society welcome visitors on the first Sunday of the month to their main location. In the near future, in response to safety measures, the group hopes to write and produce new outdoor signage and produce a self-guided walking tour. In the meantime, the public is invited to explore the resources on their professional website: odentonheritage.org.

Preservation Maryland is honored to highlight the work of the Odenton Heritage Society and all of our Best of Maryland award winners for 2020. Executive Director Nicholas Redding remarked, “History is a critical guide in uncertain times. During this ongoing health crisis, museums and historic sites have stepped up to provide historical context for today’s struggles and are authentic backdrops to explore and discuss these issues.”

The public is invited to learn more about each awardee, including the Odenton Heritage Society, and to help us honor them by attending a special event at Bengies Drive-In Movie Theater in Middle River, Maryland on Thursday, October 1, 2020. The awards event will be followed by a screening of the 1980s classic, “The Money Pit” as a nod to the challenging and sometimes humorous nature of saving old buildings. Tickets are on sale now on Preservation Maryland’s website: presmd.org/drivein.

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The mission of the Odenton Heritage Society is to preserve, protect, and promote the history and traditions of Odenton, Maryland. The society educates the public about the history of Odenton by developing programs and materials about the town’s history, publishing a newsletter about Odenton history, and by operating a free museum and reading room. The OHS advocates for the history of Odenton and encourages others to preserve and protect the town’s historic character. The society undertakes preservation projects and owns three historic buildings located in the Odenton’s original town center. Website: odentonheritage.org.

Since 1931, Preservation Maryland has worked to protect and promote Maryland’s history and heritage. As a non-profit organization, we work with partners across the state and country to accomplish this important mission through advocacy, funding, and outreach. Preservation Maryland’s major programs include the Maryland Redevelopment Revolving Fund, Campaign for Historic Trades, Smart Growth Maryland, and on-going public history, preservation, and archaeology project across the Old Line State. Website: presmd.org.