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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**RINA THALER IS FIRST EASTERN SHORE RECIPIENT OF  
THE “SUE HESS LEGACY ARTS ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR”  
FOR MARYLAND**

OCEAN CITY, MD — *Feb. 10, 2023* — The Maryland Citizens for the Arts has presented Rina Thaler, executive director of the Art League of Ocean City, with the “Sue Hess Legacy Arts Advocate of the Year Award” for 2023. The annual award recognizes an individual whose advocacy efforts have significantly increased support for and public recognition of the arts in Maryland. Thaler is the first recipient from the Eastern Shore to receive the honor.

The award’s namesake, Sue Hess, who passed in 2020, was a leader and staunch defender of the arts in Maryland for over 40 years. Hess, part of the Hess retail store family, was formerly the chair and served on the Board of Trustees of Maryland Citizens for the Arts. Working on her own at her home in Salisbury and at her beach house in the Little Salisbury neighborhood of Ocean City — near the current location of the Ocean City Center for the Arts — Hess formed a network of grassroots art supporters across the state and was instrumental in driving the growth for the arts in Maryland. The first Sue Hess Award was presented in 2009 during Maryland Arts Day and continues to be awarded to individuals whose advocacy efforts have significantly benefitted the entire Maryland arts community.

Maryland Citizen for the Arts will present Thaler with the award during the 2023 Maryland Arts Day on Zoom, Thursday, Feb. 16, 9 a.m.

Maryland Arts Day is the largest statewide advocacy day of arts professionals, connecting arts organizations with lawmakers from every legislative district in Maryland.

“Thank you to Maryland Citizens for the Arts for this honor,” Thaler said. “This award continues the legacy of my former neighbor and longtime Art League member, Sue Hess. Sue was part of the effort in the early 1990s to expand the Art League building, and she was so happy when we finally opened the new Ocean City Center for the Arts in 2013. I am proud to be part of the strong group of art advocates leading the charge to make arts accessible to the people of Ocean City, the Eastern Shore, and throughout the State of Maryland.”

Thaler spearheaded a public/private campaign to build the Ocean City Center for the Arts that opened 10 years ago in 2013 on 94<sup>th</sup> St. She was appointed the nonprofit’s first executive director at that time. The Arts Center is the largest facility in Worcester County dedicated solely to providing year-round opportunities for artistic expression and appreciation for the visual and creative arts in the community.

Under Thaler’s leadership, the Art League has grown from a small grassroots organization into a regional arts institution providing unmatched access to the arts. Since opening in 2013, more than 151,000 patrons have visited the Arts Center, and the Art League has served more than 1 million people worldwide through community opportunities and online events. Thaler’s sheer determination to bring art and cultural opportunities to an area thought of as simply a “vacation town” has stimulated the growth of a vibrant arts community. Her personal mission is to “design innovative and collaborative programs that advocate through art for social change and address pervasive social issues on the Lower Eastern Shore, including diversity, poverty, addiction, animal welfare, and mental health,” she said.

Previous awards for Thaler’s arts advocacy efforts include the 2015 Henson Award from the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore to the Art League of Ocean City, the 2017 Worcester County Commission

Woman of the Year Award, and the 2019 Distinguished Women of Ocean City Award from the Ocean City Chamber of Commerce.

Thaler served on the Ocean City Arts Advisory Board that established the 1,200-seat Ocean City Performing Arts Center, the only theater of its kind on the Lower Eastern Shore. She has also served on state-wide panels and committees including the Maryland State Arts Council, Maryland Citizens for the Arts, and Governor Hogan's Maryland Arts Recovery Task Force during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A working artist herself, Thaler is known for her contemporary water media paintings and is a founding partner of Gallery One in Ocean View, De. She is the proud mother of Brandon Thaler and Chelsea Thaler and has resided with her husband, Jeff, in Ocean City since 1980. The couple has been actively involved in the local business community for more than 40 years. In honor of their work and generosity, the Board of Directors of the Art League named the Thaler Gallery at the Arts Center in their honor.

Additional information about Thaler's art is available at [www.rinathaler.com](http://www.rinathaler.com). Information about the Art League of Ocean City is available at [www.OCart.org](http://www.OCart.org).

*The Art League of Ocean City is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing the visual arts to the community through education, exhibits, scholarship, programs and community art projects.*

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