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# Press Release

## Michigan Museums Association Awards Museum Professionals from across the state at the 2015 MMA Awards

November 3, 2015, Cheboygan, MI: Museum professionals, volunteers, and supporters recently gathered in Ann Arbor, Michigan for the 2015 Annual Michigan Museums Association Conference, as well as the MMA Awards. These awards are given annually by the association to acknowledge excellence in several areas and were presented this year on October 1. Four awards were given to individuals in the Michigan museum community. The recipients of this year's awards are:

- **Sanam Arab**, University of Michigan Library – MMA Volunteer
- **Marilyn Merdzinski**, Grand Rapids Public Museum (retired) – President's Award
- **Nancy Villa Bryk**, Historic Preservation Program, Eastern Michigan University – Peninsulas Prize
- **David Pilgrim**, Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, Ferris State University – Peninsulas Prize

*It is such an honor to be able to recognize some of the good work and dedicated service in Michigan's museums. Michigan's museums provide jobs and support communities. They educate children and engage families and groups. They preserve and share priceless works of art and historic artifacts, and promote scientific exploration and a better understanding of our shared Michigan culture. The individuals honored by us this year represent the thousands of people in our state who are passionate about their work in museums, and are well deserved. – Lisa Craig Brisson, Executive Director, MMA*

### MMA Volunteer

**Sanam Arab**, Manager of Programs and Patron Services College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) Instructional Support Services at the University of Michigan, was presented with the MMA Volunteer Award by MMA Executive Director Lisa Craig Brisson. Sanam has been a volunteer with MMA for several years, and this year was heavily involved with Museums Advocacy Day. This event is held each year in Washington, D.C. and coordinated by the American Alliance of Museums. Sanam helped assemble materials about Michigan museums and participated in hill visits to our state's legislators.

### President's Award

**Marilyn Merdzinski** was selected by MMA President, Ron Bloomfield to receive this year's award from him. Merdzinski dedicated her 38-year museum career to the Grand Rapids community. Marilyn began her work at the Grand Rapids Public Museum as a student intern while at Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI. Marilyn's demonstration of her ability to care of the City's collections during her internship resulted in her achieving a position with the Museum as a registrar clerk. Marilyn later became the Museum's registrar, then Director of Collections and finally her most recent role as Vice President of Collections. Since 2008, when the Museum moved from being a City of Grand Rapids Department to management by a publicly owned, non-profit entity, Marilyn took on a number of additional duties and projects. She became the institution's primary grant writer and lead initiatives to achieve

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the Museum's strategic plan such as the partnership to create a museum school with Grand Rapids Public Schools and core exhibit redesign. Marilyn served the state and regional museum communities as a Board of Director, Secretary and Vice-Chair for the Michigan Museums Association and a Chair of the Midwest Registrars Committee. Marilyn also presented regionally and nationally about the Public Museum's experience with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

### **Peninsulas Prize**

MMA has awarded the Peninsulas Prizes this year to Nancy Bryk, Assistant Professor of Historic Preservation at Eastern Michigan University and Dr. David Pilgrim, founder and curator of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia and professor at Ferris State University, nominated by Bradley Taylor, Associate Director, Museum Studies at the University of Michigan.

**Nancy Villa Bryk** has served as Director of Education and Public Programs at Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum and as Curator of Domestic Life at The Henry Ford. She is currently and Assistant Professor in Eastern Michigan University's Graduate Program in Historic Preservation and an adjunct with the University of Michigan's Museum Studies Program. Nancy has served as aboard member for a variety of museums and as well-known for her grant-writing skills. She has served the broader museum field as a member of the Association of Midwest Museums Board, is on the editorial boards of several professional publications, and is a Peer Reviewer in the American Alliance of Museums' Museum Assessment Program. Nancy served on the MMA Board of Directors for seven years including as Board President from 2009 to 2013. In addition to coordinating a state-wide survey of collections needs in Michigan's museums, Nancy led MMA through several challenging financial years.

**Dr. David Pilgrim** is a professor of sociology, public speaker, and one of this country's leading experts on issues relating to multiculturalism, diversity, and race relations. He is best known as the founder and curator of the Jim Crow Museum - a 5,000-piece collection of racist artifacts located at Ferris State University. The museum uses objects of intolerance to teach tolerance. Dr. Pilgrim is an applied sociologist with a doctorate from The Ohio State University. He believes that racism can be objectively studied and creatively assailed. Dr. Pilgrim challenges audiences to think deeply about diversity and race relations. Dr. Pilgrim is a Ferris State University Distinguished Teacher. Dr. Pilgrim has spent his adult life using objects of intolerance to teach tolerance. It works. His goal is to get people talking about diversity and race relations in meaningful ways-and, then, to go and do something positive.

*With an emphasis on face-to-face collaboration, the Michigan Museums Association shares expertise and resources to promote standards and practices that make the Michigan museum community thrive. MMA has been supporting the work of Michigan museums for nearly 60 years. Our members include the institutions, professionals and volunteers of the Michigan museum community who believe that strong museums help us better understand ourselves and our world. Every type of museum is represented and welcomed, including art, history, science, military and maritime, and youth museums, as well as aquariums, zoos, botanical gardens, arboretums, historic sites, and science and technology centers.*

The 2016 Michigan Museums Association Conference will be held in collaboration with the American Association for State and Local History in Detroit, Michigan (September 14 -17).

Photos of the awardees are available at [michiganmuseums.org/2015-Award-Photos](http://michiganmuseums.org/2015-Award-Photos).