



A LOOK BACK WITH DIXON

CSM: Preserving the Past, One Story at a Time

By Mike Dixon

The Historical Society of Cecil County presented the Ernest A. Howard Award to the publishers of *Cecil Soil Magazine*, Ed and Carol Belote, at its spring meeting on Saturday, March 28. This prestigious recognition honors individuals who have made a significant contribution to the preservation of the county's historic resources, while facing huge challenges in trying to protect the built environment, save scarce relics, or record folkways. Each and every page of the local publication, completely filled with unique content, captures the area's history, culture and the arts in a way that no other serial does. In its premiere issue nearly five years ago, the publisher said the magazine, which was written by and about the people of the area, was "a grass-roots forum established to honor and promote the people and businesses of our county."

Ed had a vision about publishing a magazine for the "gentle people of Cecil County" in 2003. Struggling to bring his idea to readers, at a time when print publications were disappearing, he had to obtain high-quality local editorial content to fill pages, get advertising to support the enterprise, make sure circulation was good, and arrange all the back-shop affairs. Somehow at Back Porch Publications, (the name of his holding company), Ed and his wife, Carol, a team of two, overcame many start-up obstacles.

At the presentation, Ed remarked that he was delighted to be honored by the Howard award. "It's exciting for us to be following in those footsteps in the 21st century. Carol and I are pleased that we have been able to create a homegrown product for the county's readers and advertisers," Ed added. "It is the stories of the everyday people that make our magazine what it is." To illustrate, he discussed his premiere issue that featured Vince and Sid LaMonica and the story about Circus Park by 90-year-old Mildred Letts. Both Mrs. Letts and the LaMonicas were on hand to receive special recognition from the Society. "I joke with our advertisers that their ads will be around for a hundred years because I know the Society is archiving each copy."

Paula Newton of the Historical Society presents the prestigious Ernest A. Howard award to Ed Belote.



Paula Newton, current Historical Society president remarked, "We are pleased to place *Cecil Soil* in this class. Without Ed's exceptional publication permanently documenting the memories of our residents, many of these recollections would fade in time. We have government agencies to record facts and figures for posterity, but the most important historical records—the memories of the people—would be lost were it not for this venue for sharing recollections of people, places and things right here in the county. Ed, thank you for joining in as a keeper of our heritage. We proudly archive each and every edition and use them frequently as people research the county's past. We thank Ed for his efforts and we look forward to a continued partnership that records time's passage at the head of the Chesapeake. We also thank Ed for being a strong supporter of the Society."

As Cecil County changes in the first decade of a new century, it is important that our residents, new and old, know about the heritage of the place that is their home. In the short five years since the premier issue hit the streets, the community has embraced this home-grown Cecil-focused periodical. It is also valued for its website, www.cecilsoilmagazine.com which averages over 200,000 hits per month. Six times a year, subscribers look forward to the arrival of *Cecil Soil* at their doorsteps.

The award is named after Ernest A. Howard, a man who was especially instrumental in helping to build the strong Historical Society of 1,000 members, which serves as the county's heritage-keeper. Born in Childs in 1885, this benefactor of the organization was deeply involved in the successful revival of the nonprofit in the 1950s and served it as historian and editor of the newsletter. He worked tirelessly to preserve local heritage and was active in the restoration of several old churches and others buildings. In 1955 he was a central figure in the establishment of a modern headquarters for the Cecil County library, and he donated a wing to the library in part to provide a home for the Historical Society. Howard passed away in 1973.

This prestigious award is only given to someone who has overcome significant obstacles to preserve our past. It was last awarded to Earl Simmers for the work he did to preserve Gilpin Falls Covered Bridge. Despite the many risks faced by this relic owned by Cecil County Government, Simmers never gave up on the structure. Right now, thanks to Earl's tireless efforts, the bridge is being preserved with the help of a federal grant. —CSM



(L-R) Award recipients Carol and Ed Belote are congratulated by special guests Vincent and Sidonia LaMonica, and Mildred Letts.

