

Congratulations to the 2023 winners of the Lois Roth Awards for excellence in cultural and educational diplomacy given in partnership with the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).

The response to the call for nominations showed the depth and breadth of excellence in cultural diplomacy. Every one of the nominees was clearly an outstanding individual who demonstrated that the legacy of Lois Roth lives on today. With so many praise-worthy nominees, the selection committee had an extremely difficult job and we thank the nominating officers and all the candidates for their outstanding work.

Please watch this space in the coming weeks for more on each of the 2023 winners. For now, please join us in applauding these outstanding cultural diplomats:

The 2023 Lois Roth Award for excellence in cultural diplomacy goes to Laurence (Larry) Socha, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy Mogadishu, Somalia. Three years after the restoration of U.S. diplomatic presence in Mogadishu after a nearly 30 year absence, Larry Socha is updating the U.S.-Somalia narrative popularized by Hollywood scripts now decades old to an authentic account of partnership with Somali institutions. Larry kickstarted programs for artists, exchange participants, English Teaching Fellows, a new American Corner and events like his "Family Room Film Series," that have opened the doors of our Embassy to Somalis living outside the security barriers of the airport and achieved that "last three feet" of people-to-people diplomacy.

An honorable Mention for the 2023 Lois Roth Award went to Christienne Carroll, Public Diplomacy Officer for Public Engagement, U.S. Embassy Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Christienne has applied her vision of bringing disparate peoples together and improving their chances for success during a series of assignments in the toughest PD environments. In Iraq (twice), Tunis and her current post, Christienne uses her superior foreign language, programming and grants management skills to offer a broad swath of public carefully-crafted civic and educational programs with lasting impact.

The 2023 Lois Roth Foundation's Gill Jacot-Guillarmod Award for excellence in cultural diplomacy went to Bernice Affotey, Education Specialist, U.S. Embassy Accra, Ghana. Berenice Affotey has motivated and prepared thousands of students to follow their dreams of studying in the United States. In addition, Ms. Affotey generously serves as a trainer and mentor to institutional contacts, her fellow Sub-Saharan African Advisers and at many international education conferences. Every school break brings former students returning from the United States, who are the future civic and cultural leaders of Ghana, to pay a visit to "Auntie Bernice," as she is affectionately known, to share their deep gratitude for her work, a sentiment shared by the entire Mission.

Honorable Mention for the 2023 Lois Roth Foundation's Gill Jacot-Guillarmod Award for excellence in cultural diplomacy went to Sharon I-Hua Hsieh, Public Engagement Specialist for Education and Cultural Policy, American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). Sharon I-Hua Hsieh is recognized for greatly expanding people-to-people ties by spearheading the efforts to launch a new U.S.-Taiwan Education Initiative. By nurturing partnerships with several Taiwan ministries,

she increased both U.S. and host-country funding for exchanges, making Taiwan's Fulbright/Foundation for Scholarly Exchange program one of the largest in the region and its English Teaching Assistant Program one of the biggest in the world. She followed up with a strategic plan to make the initiative a sustainable pillar in our bilateral relationship.

The Lois Roth Foundation's Gill Jacot-Guillarmod Awards for Career Achievement:

- ***Irina Colin, Established Opinion Leaders Specialist, U.S. Embassy, Chisinau, Moldova.*** Over twenty-six years, mentoring dozens of new staff, Irina has built a culture of high achievers by her example. A strategic thinker, skillful implementer and trusted colleague, Irina deciphers complexities from Moldova's culture to the PDSI process to make her section better. Across every segment of Moldovan society there are former USG exchange participants applying their knowledge to Moldova's challenges thanks to Irina Colin's years of dedicated service.
- ***Josita Ekouevi, Public Engagement Specialist for Established Opinion Leaders, U.S. Embassy, Lomé, Togo.*** For twenty-five years, one thousand exchange alumni have considered "Auntie Josita" part of their family for her skill in guiding them to successful exchange experiences. Membership in the self-run Global Alumni Association of Togo is viewed as prestigious and an advantage in Togo's difficult job market. Generously sharing her expertise with colleagues in other Bureaus and in DC, Josita's work with participants and alumni represents the highest ideals of U.S. cultural and educational exchanges.
- ***Sami Saaied, Strategic Public Engagement Specialist, U.S. Embassy, Tunis, Tunisia.*** Over more than twenty years managing PD outreach and speaker programs, Sami has used his expertise in grants management, his broad contact base and deep knowledge of the academic scene in Tunisia to bring U.S. perspectives to thought leaders and decision-makers across a wide spectrum of urgent and long-running issues, including PRC influence, business higher education, security cooperation, anti-trafficking, and DEIA. He is recognized for his lasting contributions throughout Mission Tunisia.
- ***László Vizsy, Emerging Voices Specialist, U.S. Embassy, Budapest, Hungary.*** During László's thirty-plus years of service, his innovative leadership in outreach to tens of thousands of students, management of five American Corners, interpretation skills, and supervisory skills have been instrumental in furthering cultural understanding and educational opportunities for both countries. Although the relationship has waxed and waned over the years, the overall positive impression of America in Hungary is largely the result of cultural programming led by László Vizsy.

The 2023 Ilchman-Richardson Award winner is Maria Eugenia ('Jenny') Verdaguer, Branch Chief, Western Hemisphere Programs Branch, Office of Academic Exchange Programs (ECA/A/E/WHA), Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), U.S. State Department, Washington, DC. Since 2007, Jenny has led a team of international exchange professionals supporting 1,700 participants per year from thirty countries. Jenny pioneered multi-country Fulbright collaborative research initiatives, including the Fulbright Regional Network for

Applied Research (NEXUS) Program, and the new Fulbright Amazonia Initiative reflecting current multi-disciplinary and team-based research approaches to academic cooperation on climate change and conservation issues. In a further example of innovative leadership, Jenny introduced regional webinars for Fulbright Commissions and U.S. Embassy staff on mental health and cross-cultural adaptation strategies to strengthen structures of support and inclusion for diverse Fulbright participants. As a bicultural and bilingual Latin Americanist, herself the product of international exchange, Jenny understands first-hand the transformational power of international education, and strives to multiply and enhance Fulbright life-changing experiences across the Americas.

ECA Assistant Secretary Satterfield and the Lois Roth Foundation salute all the winners, nominees and their nominators for participating in this competition. All of the nominations demonstrated great talent and dedication. Lois Roth would have been proud to serve with all of them.