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The Open World Leadership Center Turns 15 With A Tribute to the Leadership of Dr. James H. Billington

Washington DC – The Open World Leadership Center celebrated its 15th Anniversary with a spectacular celebration at the Library of Congress, and paid tribute to Open World’s founding Chairman Dr. James H. Billington for his vision and leadership with numerous accolades, awards and the announcement of the Billington Rose. Event Chair Susan Carmel Lerhman, along with the Open World Leadership Center’s Board, marked this occasion with “An Evening of Music and Friendship” which included special appearances by famed pianist Valentina Lisitsa, Grammy Award-winning Violist Kim Kashkashian with pianist Robert Levin, internationally acclaimed bass Askar Abdrazakov, and Grammy Award-winning opera star Harolyn Blackwell. The evening’s Master of Ceremonies was former U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation John Beyrle, and other speakers included Open World Trustees Senator Roger Wicker (MS), former U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation and Open World Trustee Ambassador James F. Collins, and Open World Leadership Center Chairman Walter Scott, Jr.

Said Open World Center’s Executive Director Ambassador John O’Keefe, “Last night we celebrated Open World’s 15th anniversary and founding chair Dr. James H. Billington’s vision and continued leadership as we move into an extraordinarily challenging time. The program focus continues to be on the countries of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. Our work in Russia is needed now more than ever.”

Ambassador James F. Collins agreed and added, “15 years ago Jim Billington began a program that has been creative and brought a unique dimension to the exchange of citizens between the United States and the countries of the former Soviet Union. I am proud to have been a part of this effort for all 15 years.”

Event Chair, and Founder and Advisor of the American University’s Initiative for Russian Culture Susan Carmel Lerhman, announced the Billington Rose during her remarks, and lauded Dr. Billington’s work when she said, “The generosity with which you share your time and wisdom is remarkable, and deeply appreciated by so many. Your efforts have helped lead generations towards the path of mutual cooperation and respect, and I believe your influences will result in a more peaceful future.”

Librarian of Congress and Open World Founding Chair Dr. James H. Billington reflected on Open World’s anniversary and the evening when he said, “The work that the Open World Leadership Center does to identify, connect, and follow up with the first post-Soviet generation is unique. It is the most original exchange program I have seen in 56 years of administering and participating in such programs. Our event chair for the evening, Susan Carmel Lehrman, has been a tireless supporter of U.S. cultural outreach, particularly with Russia. Her support made this beautiful evening possible and her musical program and décor make it unforgettable.”

For Photos click on link: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/trkwidu0ofq8ieh/AAAa9D9Scu3kf_vPXNVBOilga?dl=0

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1. From left to right: The Honorable James Symington, The Honorable John Beyrle, former U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation and the evening's Master of Ceremonies, The Honorable Diarmuid O'Scannlain, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and Chairman of the International Judicial Relations Committee, and The Honorable John O'Keefe, Executive Director of the Open World Leadership Center.
2. Ambassador John O'Keefe, Open World Founding Chairman, The Honorable James H. Billington.
3. The Honorable and Mrs. James H. Billington, Susan Carmel Lehrman.
4. Young professionals from Ukraine participating in the Open World program.
5. Cocktail reception.
6. Supreme Court Justice and Mrs. Samuel Alito, Senator Roger. F. Wicker.
7. The Honorable John Beyrle.
8. Open World Trustee Senator Roger F. Wicker.
9. Open World Trustee James F. Collins, former U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation.
10. Open World Chairman Walter Scott Jr.
11. Susan Carmel Lehrman.
12. The Honorable James H. Billington.
13. The Honorable James H. Billington.
14. Soprano Harolyn Blackwell.
15. The Honorable James H. Billington, performers, Mrs. James H. Billington.
16. The Honorable and Mrs. James H. Billington.
17. Susan Carmel Lehrman, The Honorable and Mrs. James H. Billington.
- 18/19. Dinner with Billington Rose centerpieces.
- 20/21/22. Desserts.
23. Senator. Roger F. Wicker

About the Open World Leadership Center:

The Open World Leadership Center, a legislative branch agency, supports Congressional outreach to Eurasia and other countries. It conducts exchanges that establish lasting professional relationships between the up-and-coming leaders of Open World countries and Americans dedicated to showcasing U.S. values and democratic institutions. Open World has introduced more than 23,000 current and future decision makers from Russia, Ukraine, and other countries of Eurasia to American political and civic life, and to their American counterparts. The U.S. Congress established Open World in 1999. For more information, please visit www.openworld.gov and visit Open World's Twitter feed, @OWProgram.

About the Billington Rose:

This hearty and vigorous flower will yield beautiful, fragrant flowers season after season. It will easily be recognizable for its vivid magenta coloring, its unique fragrance and its classic form. The rose is without a doubt the most popular and beautiful of all floral specimens and is recognized as our national flower. As such, we believe this is a fitting acknowledgement for both Dr. and Mrs. James H. Billington, and their unparalleled commitment to the beauty of greater cultural understanding.

The Billington Rose is registered with the International Rose Registry and will be published by the American Rose Society for international recognition in the coming year. The Billington Rose will be planted in the Presidential Rose Garden, the Washington Mall, the U.S. Botanic Rose Garden, and other national gardens for the general public to enjoy.