

2 Newport men bound for Heritage Hall of Fame

By Sean Flynn
Staff writer

NEWPORT — William Vareika accepted the award for John La Farge's induction into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame in 2011, little knowing he would be joining the famous artist in the hall six years later.

Bart Dunbar, chairman of the nonprofit organization Oliver Hazard Perry Rhode Island and president of Bowen's Wharf Co., which he began developing almost 50 years ago, will also be inducted in the Hall of Fame this year.



Vareika

Dunbar

"It's a great honor," Vareika said. "Anyone who is selected is humbled because of the great people who are already in the Hall of Fame."

Vareika first became acquainted with the work of La Farge, who lived from 1835 to 1910 and spent much of his life in Newport, during an art history class at Boston College. When Vareika visited Newport as part of his studies in the early 1970s, he was drawn into a struggle to save Newport Congregational Church with its La Farge murals and stained-glass windows from bulldozing.

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PATRICK CONLEY

chairman of the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame board of directors

He decided to devote his summer before law school to the campaign, which turned into six years of unpaid community organizing and negotiating among church members and developers.

"That's what brought me here, that's what kept me here, and that's why I stayed out of law school," Vareika said.

He started working for the Newport Art Museum and began trolling yard sales and thrift shops for art works and reselling them to galleries.

Vareika and his wife Alison opened William Vareika Fine Arts on Bellevue Avenue in 1987 and have built it into one of the largest and most respected galleries in the country, specializing in the purchase and sale of 18th-Century to early 20th-Century American works of art, with an emphasis on the important artists who were attracted to the Newport region.

"The gallery has also been recognized for presenting benefit exhibitions that have raised public awareness and millions of dollars for a variety of charitable causes," the Hall of Fame

induction nomination says.

Dunbar took over Bowen's Wharf in downtown Newport in 1969 and turned it into a commercial center of the Newport waterfront. Currently Bowen's Wharf provides water access for a commercial fishery business, one sailing and two power harbor tour businesses, the Jamestown-Newport ferry service and Save The Bay vessels.

He is a graduate of Harvard University who taught steamship and sail training at the Naval Academy after having been exposed to sailing at an early age by his father, a yacht designer, and a family that was fully immersed in the boating world.

Dunbar played a key role in the incorporation of the American Sail Training Association, now called Tall Ships America, in the early 1970s.

He led the effort to build the 200-foot SSV Oliver Hazard Perry, a three-masted, square-rigged Tall Ship that was named "Rhode Island's Official Sailing Education Vessel" by the General Assembly. The ship began its education-at-sea programs in 2015 in partnership with various educational

institutions, while also offering camp opportunities for teens and sailing adventures for adults.

Vareika and Dunbar were nominated to the Hall of Fame by author, playwright and scriptwriter Ken Dooley, who lives in Newport.

The Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame was established in 1965 to honor and publicize the achievements of men and women from the state who have, in the words of the induction citation, "made significant contributions to their community, state, and, or nation."

Past inductees include the historical figures Roger Williams, Moses Brown, Oliver Hazard Perry, Richard Morris Hunt and Stanford White, while more recent honorees include the late U.S. senators Claiborne Pell, John Chafee and John Pastore, as well as actors James Woods and Anthony Quinn.

"Newport has contributed many outstanding individuals to the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame," announced Patrick Conley, chairman of the Hall of Fame's board of directors. "The rich tradition continues with the addition of such outstanding candidates as William M. Vareika and Bartlett S. Dunbar."

Conley pointed out they will be joining recent Newport inductees like the late Noreen Stonor Drexel, a philanthropist and community leader who was inducted in 2015 and the late Leonard J. Panaggio, who was long active in state tourism

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development and was a columnist for The Newport Daily News. He was inducted in 2016.

Among the many organizations that have benefited from Vareika's charitable giving on Aquidneck Island are Aquidneck Land Trust; the International Yachting Restoration School and Museum of Yachting; the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center; Newport Historical Society; Newport Music Festival; Newport Opera House; Newport Tree Society; The Norman Bird Sanctuary; the Potter League for Animals; Preservation Society of Newport County; Redwood Library and Athenaeum; Salve Regina University and Save The Bay. The list is much longer when organizations across the state and in New England

are included.

Vareika also has donated dozens of artworks to museums and other charitable organizations. He established the William Vareika Award for Arts and Public Policy conferred annually on a Salve Regina graduate with a demonstrated appreciation for art, as well as a social conscience.

Vareika served on the board of the Newport Art Museum for 20 years and was a member of the museum's Collections and Exhibitions Committee for 38 years. He has been a board member of the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, the Newport Music Festival, and Save The Bay. He also has served on a number of advisory committees, including the Martin Luther King Center.

He is a former vice chairman of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, and remains a member of the State House Restoration Society. He is a member of the board of the

Rhode Island State Council on the Humanities and a trustee of the non-profit Newport Festivals Foundation that operates the Newport Jazz Festival and the Newport Folk Festival.

Dunbar served nine years as an officer in the Navy, where he was involved in the formation of six sailing associations, ran the Navy's basic seamanship program at the Naval Academy and co-authored the Navy's basic seamanship book, *Sail and Power*.

With extensive community involvement, Dunbar and his wife, Lisa, see philanthropy as a way of living. The Dunbar's eldest son, Emmett, and Lisa started the Aquidneck Grower's Market, the first farmer's market in Newport now with two locations. The family has been involved in, among other organizations, Child & Family, the Newport Tree Society, the Historical Society and the Martin Luther King Center.

"Supporting Child & Family and others who serve here is what it means to be a Newporter," Dunbar said. "Pulling everyone in from the community is symbolic of why people are proud of our city."

Dunbar was a co-founder of Sail Newport after Newport's loss of hosting the America's Cup in 1983.

"Sailing is not just about yacht racing, there are many different aspects of learning from sailing, and there are so many kids growing up here, living around the water, who don't have that access or opportunity," he said.

The induction ceremony for Vareika and Dunbar will take place Saturday, May 6, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Warwick beginning at 6 p.m.

Reservations for the event can be made by calling 556-6174 or emailing somravanh@gmail.com

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