

Chris Collins Featured in The Worcester Guardian, Not a Difficult Choice: Chris Collings Gets the Isaiah Thomas Award

March 29, 2024 | In The News

'Not a difficult choice,' Chris Collins gets Isaiah Thomas award
March 29, 2024|Nonprofit, Profiles/features – The Worcester Guardian

After a considerable hiatus, the prestigious award has returned, recognizing a prominent lawyer in the city who has made significant contributions

WORCESTER—The Isaiah Thomas Award is making a comeback after a six-year hiatus. The prestigious award is presented to a person who demonstrates exceptional dedication to community service, embodying the spirit of Isaiah Thomas.

You see, Isaiah Thomas was a trailblazer in Worcester, pioneering many firsts including the city's inaugural newspaper and bank, serving as its initial postmaster and honorary judge. His lifelong dedication to enhancing his community and nation earned him the title of Worcester's "first great citizen."

So it's a big deal to get this award in his name.

This year, the Isaiah Thomas Award is being presented to J. Christopher Collins, an attorney at Mirick O'Connell, who has a remarkable history of service and leadership in Central Massachusetts.

"I was very surprised [to have been chosen]," Collins told the Worcester Guardian. "It has been a while since the award has been given out so it was not even something to be dreaming about. The moment I found out, I just thought about all the previous winners and how humbling it was to be part of this group of people who have done so much for the community. I am beyond grateful."

With more than 30 years of experience, Collins is renowned for his



Related Services

[Life, Health, Disability and ERISA Litigation](#)
[Litigation](#)

Related Industries

[Non-Profit Organizations](#)

Related People

[J. Christopher Collins](#)

expertise in life, health, and disability insurance matters. But beyond his professional achievements, Collins has made an indelible mark on the Worcester community.

Collins lives in Sterling but said he “does his living” in Worcester. With more than three decades of experience representing the life and health insurance industry, he has been based in Worcester since 1984. A graduate of the College of the Holy Cross and Vermont Law School, Collins is admitted to the Massachusetts Bar, the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, and the First Circuit Court of Appeals.

Married to Catherine Zimmer Collins, he is a proud parent to Sarah and Daniel, both residing in Los Angeles. Currently serving on the Board of Trustees at the College of the Holy Cross and on the Council at the American Antiquarian Society, Collins also co-chairs the ongoing capital campaign for Nativity.

Collins’s extensive involvement includes serving on numerous nonprofit boards, such as the Nativity School, American Antiquarian Society, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, and Worcester Art Museum. He has also chaired campaigns for organizations such as the United Way of Central Massachusetts and ArtsWorcester.

Growing up in Walpole, Collins attributes his inclination toward philanthropy to the dynamics of small-town living. His parents operated a jewelry and gift store, while his uncles ran a flower shop and a news and gift store, at which people would line up to buy the newspaper. He and his brothers, too, worked as paperboys, embodying the quintessential charm of a tight-knit small town, where familiarity abounds, and everyone knows everyone.

“We got the feel for what makes a town a community,” Collins said. “Then off to Holy Cross where the Jesuit mission of being with and for and with others was our motto. We were challenged to use the privilege of a Holy Cross education not just for ourselves but for the broader world around us. I bought into it hook, line, and sinker. After law school, I had the amazing good fortune of being hired into the law department at the Paul Revere Life Insurance Company, which was headquartered in downtown Worcester. The leadership of the company was emphatic that we were to find a way to be involved in the community. It was a great corporate culture. I finally got the chance to serve, and with this background, I

jumped in with both feet. It's been an incredible ride.”

Urged to name “a favorite” in terms of volunteering, Collins said, “It’s hard to choose, but I would say the Nativity School of Worcester. Nativity is truly a transformative island of hope for the students who go there. It merged my love of Jesuit education with helping underserved children who live in Worcester. Students at Nativity get a first-rate private school education that focuses on the whole person. We ask them to be scholars, but also to be mindful about shaping their character and to find ways to be generous. To date, Nativity has only served boys in grades 5-8. In July, we are opening the Julie Powers Girls Division. It is going to be terrific.”

Initiated by the AdClub of Greater Worcester in 1950, management of the Isaiah Thomas Awards has transitioned between several organizations over the years. Guided by the Worcester Regional Research Bureau (WRRB), Mark W. Fuller, honored in 2014, is spearheading the revival of this esteemed tradition. Fuller teamed up with a committee comprising the past five award recipients, including Warner Fletcher as the most recent, to select this year’s honoree.

“Clearly, this was a highly qualified group,” Fuller told the Worcester Guardian. “My opinion is that the next award ceremony will be in two years and that the nomination process will be vastly different.”

Fuller said that the Isaiah Thomas award is essentially a “citizen of the year” recognition, once the most prestigious of its kind in Worcester.

“It was in the best interests of the community at large to reestablish it,” said Fuller. “Isaiah Thomas was arguably one of the first great citizens of Worcester. The award recognizes the value of good citizenship and the giving of an individual’s time, talent, and treasure. The committee hopes to incent others to aspire to be civic leaders and volunteers.”

The nominating committee discussed verbally a list of potential honorees, explained Fuller, and it did “come down to a chosen few.”

“Ultimately, Chris was chosen, as he emulated the qualities that the committee was looking for,” said Fuller. “Those included a long period of leadership for nonprofit organizations. He served on multiple boards. He chaired boards and led fundraising campaigns. He worked most of his career in Worcester. Frankly, it was not a difficult choice.”

Collins expressed his deep affection for Worcester, rooted in his fascination with its rich history spanning from the era of Native Americans

through its pre-colonial and colonial periods, the Industrial Revolution, and its resurgence as a hub for education and medicine.

“When you appreciate what has happened here under Worcester skies,” said Collins, “it is truly an amazing place to live and work and be part of the present community shaping Worcester’s future. You need to get behind some of the facades of the great institutions to see what is happening every day in the city. I never get tired of learning things about the city I did not know.”

Honor Collins for his outstanding contributions to Worcester and beyond on Friday, April 5, at Mechanics Hall. The evening starts with a cocktail hour at 6 p.m. followed by the program and dinner at 7 p.m.