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# News Release

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**Joint Aspire Award Honors Three Women Representing the Future of the Historic Preservation Movement**

*National Trust and American Express to present joint award to Zulmilena Then, Allison Toonen-Talamo, and Melissa Mortimer at the 2020 National Preservation Conference*

**Washington, DC (October 26, 2020)** The **National Trust for Historic Preservation** and **American Express** will present the Aspire Award to **Zulmilena Then,** president and founder of Preserving East New York in Brooklyn, NY; **Allison Toonen-Talamo**, associate II at Klein and Hoffman in Chicago, IL**;** and **Melissa Mortimer**, historic preservation planner at Southeast Tennessee Development District. The Aspire Award is one of nine awards to be presented by the National Trust during its **2020 PastForward Online National Preservation Conference** this week.

The American Express Aspire Award recognizes emerging preservation leaders who demonstrate innovative thinking and achievement in advancing historic preservation in their local, state, or national communities.

This year’s joint award honors three accomplished women who each bring a unique perspective to the field. Through their expertise in engineering, city planning, and advocacy, Then, Toonen-Talamo, and Mortimer are changing the landscape of the preservation profession and creating a stronger national movement.

In Brooklyn, Zulmilena Then is the president and founder of Preserving East New York (PENY), a bilingual preservation advocacy group, and the preservation manager at Weeksville Heritage Center. PENY was organized by Then to preserve the culture and historic structures of East New York through landmarking protection. Then focuses on educating under-represented citizens about the importance of their voice within preservation through her information stands at local farmers markets, bilingual tours in her neighborhood, and “heartbombing” actions that show community love for local landmarks. Through her strategic advocacy, Then is creating space for people of color to join the preservation conversation and to change the narrative in their communities -- that too often have been unfairly stigmatized by outsiders.

In Chicago, Alison Toonen-Talamo advocates tirelessly for the preservation and improvement of historic structures. A first generation Mexican-American professional, Toonen-Talamo has used her personal history to advocate, energize, and improve communities impacted by incompatible development. Toonen-Talamo played a pivotal role in preserving the National Landmark Ford Tri-Motor Hangar in Lansing, Illinois, which is now a point of pride for the Lansing community. Toonen-Talamo has also worked to strengthen the next generation of leaders working in the built environment through her role as chair of Landmarks Illinois’ Skyline Council, where she organizes fundraising events and networking opportunities for the committee of young preservationists in the Chicago community.

In Chattanooga, Melissa Mortimer works as a historic preservation planner where she has leveraged over one million dollars in state and federal grant funds, making possible the restoration and transformation of many important buildings, including the famous Historic Rhea County Courthouse. Alongside the Tennessee Valley Authority and the National Park Service, Mortimer works to interpret and preserve historic places and unvarnished stories of the Cherokee Removal, which is part of the Trail of Tears. Mortimer also promotes awareness and education of preservation in her community through Preservation Chattanooga, a new program of Cornerstones, Inc., which offers workshops around basic restoration techniques.

“This year’s American Express Aspire Award recipients,” said Paul Edmondson, president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, “showcase the full breadth of amazing preservation work being done around our nation. The awards ceremony is our chance to highlight the greater good that is served by individuals, nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and corporations that are investing in and enhancing American communities, and strengthening the preservation movement. It is an honor to present the Aspire Award to Zulmilena Then, Allison Toonen-Talamo, and Melissa Mortimer.”

This year’s recipients will be honored at the virtual National Preservation Awards ceremony, hosted by television host and preservationist Bob Vila, on October 29, 2020 as part of PastForward Online 2020. The program will be streamed for free from SavingPlaces.org/Conference.

The National Preservation Awards are bestowed on those whose skill and determination have given new meaning to their communities through preservation of our architectural and cultural heritage. These efforts include citizen attempts to save and maintain important landmarks; companies and crafts people whose work restores the richness of the past; the vision of public officials who support preservation projects and legislation in their communities; and educators and journalists who help Americans understand the value of preservation. The winners of the National Preservation Awards will appear online at <http://forum.savingplaces.org/act/preservation-awards>.

Sample tweet: Zulmilena Then, Allison Toonen-Talamo, and Melissa Mortimer receive joint @AmericanExpress Aspire Award for emerging leaders at #PastForward20

**The 2020 National Preservation Award Winners:**

Louise du Pont Crowninshield Award: Mary Means, *Silver Spring, MD*

The American Express Aspire Award: Zulmilena Then, *Brooklyn, NY*; Allison Toonen-Talamo, *Chicago, IL;* and Melissa Mortimer, *Chattanooga, TN*

John H. Chafee Trustees’ Award for Outstanding Achievement in Public Policy: Great Outdoors Act Coalition, with special recognition for the National Parks Conservation Association and Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition, and also the National Park Foundation, The Corps Network, The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land.

The National Trust/Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Award for Federal Partnerships in Historic Preservation: U.S. General Services Administration Section 111 Outleasing Program, *Nationwide.*

TheTrustees’ Award for Organizational Excellence: Preservation Dallas, *Dallas, TX.*

Trustees Emeritus Award for Historic Site Stewardship: Greenwich Historical Society, *Cos Cob, CT.*

**THE 2020 RICHARD H. DRIEHAUS FOUNDATION NATIONAL PRESERVATION AWARD WINNERS:**

Fowler Clark Epstein Farm, *Boston, MA.*

Universal Life Insurance Company Building, *Memphis, TN.*

Chelsea District Health Center, *New York, NY.*

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**About the National Trust for Historic Preservation**  
The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a privately funded nonprofit organization, works to save America’s historic places. www.SavingPlaces.org