Mountain Heritage Awards recognize Affrilachian Artist Project, Plott hound educator

Western Carolina University will present the 2023 Mountain Heritage Awards during the Mountain Heritage Day festival Saturday, Sept. 30, on the Ingles Blue Ridge Stage at noon. The Mountain Heritage Awards are presented each year to an individual and organization in recognition of exceptional contributions to Southern Appalachian history, culture, and folklore. A committee of university and community representatives select recipients.

The **Affrilachian Artist Project** is the recipient of the 2023 organizational Mountain Heritage Day Award for its commitment to and promotion of the arts across Appalachia. The organization promotes artists of color in the mountains and the concept of "Affrilachian," a term coined by Frank X Walker in his 1990s collection of poetry to combat Appalachian stereotypes. In response to the persistent erasure of an Affrilachian cultural presence, founding curator Marie T. Cochran collaborated with other artists and organizations to establish the Affrilachian Artist Project in 2011. Together they created a directory of Black visual artists in the region. Today, the community includes 2,000 individuals and organizations that celebrate and explore the intersection of cultures in Appalachia.

This year's individual Mountain Heritage Award recognizes **Bob Plott** for his efforts to document and share the history of North Carolina's state dog, the Plott hound, named for his family. Plott is the author of five award-winning books, a monthly contributor to two national hunting magazines and conducts educational programs across the Southeast. Plott hounds are the only dog breed officially recognized as originating in North Carolina. Bob Plott's great-great-great grandfather, Johannes Plott, left Germany and immigrated to North Carolina in 1750 with five family hunting dogs, ancestors of the breed recognized today. In 2009, Plott served as an advisor for the Plott hound exhibit at Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Center. The award-winning exhibit continues to tour extensively across the Southeast and is currently at the City of Raleigh Museum.