

Milwaukee Press Club: Announces 2026 Sacred Cat and Headliner Awards

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The Milwaukee Press Club has named **Astead Herndon**, a host and editorial director at Vox, as the club's 2026 Sacred Cat Award honoree. The award, given annually since 1973, recognizes excellence in journalism at the national level.

Herndon will accept the award at the club's annual Gridiron Awards event, set for Friday, May 8 at The Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee.

The club also will honor its 2026 Headliners community service awardees: **Ken-David Masur**, music director and conductor with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra; and **Mary McCormick**, Executive Director at Rotary Club of Milwaukee.

Winners of the press club's 2025 Excellence in Wisconsin Journalism competition will also be announced at the Gridiron.

"We had another strong contest year in terms of the number of entries," said Tom Daykin, club president. "We look forward to honoring the outstanding work of Wisconsin journalists."

"I'm looking forward to hearing what our Sacred Cat honoree has to say about the state of journalism and the continuing role of news websites like Vox."

Past Sacred Cat honorees include James Bennet, Manu Raju, Cokie Roberts, Gloria Borger, Frank Deford, Marty Baron, Ann Compton, Jodi Kantor, Megan Twohey and Walter Cronkite.

As a host and editorial director at Vox, Astead Herndon helps lead politics coverage across text, video, audio, and social media platforms.

He's held that role since October after previously working at the New York Times, where he hosted The Run-Up podcast and reported stories in text, audio, and video formats.

Herndon's reporting is known for translating complex political dynamics into clear, nuanced stories.

He was named the 2025 Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Black Journalists and also won the Distinguished Journalist Award from DePaul University in 2025.

Herndon is a Marquette University alum and a former Milwaukee Journal Sentinel intern.

World-renowned conductor Ken-David Masur is concluding his seventh and final season with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra as music director. He also remains the principal conductor of the Chicago Symphony's Civic Orchestra.

During his tenure, Masur guided the MSO through a pandemic and shared in the unveiling of the new Bradley Symphony Center and the renovated Allen-Bradley Hall at the Historic Warner Grand Theater.

Masur is known for his innovative programming and bringing diverse music and musicians to the MSO.

This season, Masur has celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the MSO Chorus, featuring performances of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 as well as Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

Under his leadership, the MSO will celebrate America's 250th birthday weaving in the music of Aaron Copland with the words of Mark Twain.

Born and raised in Leipzig, Germany, Masur has embraced the city of Milwaukee, saying he sees many similarities to his hometown.

Mary McCormick's award recognizes her 25-year stint as Rotary Club of Milwaukee's executive director, where her tenure included the creation of Rotary Amphitheater at Discovery World.

The amphitheater's events include the Live @ The Lakefront concert series which returns this summer for its 17th season.

Other projects under her watch include development of Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum at the Urban Ecology Center; upgrades at Brown Street Academy's schoolyard and neighboring Johnson Park, and the opening of MKE Urban Stables.

In 2009, she helped launch a scholarship program that supports 25 students annually.

Also, Rotary's international footprint also expanded under McCormick's direction, with more than \$2.5 million invested in infrastructure projects in Guatemala.

McCormick is retiring in June from her position at Rotary Club of Milwaukee. She was named executive director in 2001 and plans to remain involved as a club member.

Past Headliner honorees include former Wisconsin Governors Tommy Thompson and Martin Schreiber, Howard Fuller, Ted Kellner, Ricardo Diaz, Linda Mellowes, Michael Pink, Barry Alvarez, Jane Pettit, Bud Selig, James Lovell, Leroy Butler, Carmen Pitre, Ben Marcus and Steve Marcus.

Founded in 1885, the Milwaukee Press Club is the oldest continuously operating press club in North America. Its members represent a diverse community of media-focused professionals from nearly every local media outlet, a strong contingent of public relations and marketing professionals and others with an interest in journalism and news media.