

Maryland Comptroller Recognizes Potomac Member

Story by Taashi Rowe

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Last Friday Peter Franchot, comptroller for the state of Maryland, presented Erwin Mack, head elder at **Potomac Conference's** Sligo church in Takoma Park, Md., with a community service award in front of two dozen local officials, church members, family members and community leaders. The comptroller presents the William Donald Schaefer Helping People Award, named after the state's former governor and comptroller, to individuals and organizations in each county and Baltimore City who best exemplify the name sake's lifelong commitment to helping people. According to the comptroller's office, the winners met the following criteria: "improving the community, swiftly solving a citizen problem through effective government intervention, directly aiding the most vulnerable in society or creating a public/private

Peter Franchot (right), Maryland state comptroller, presents Erwin Mack, a Sligo member, with a proclamation from the state.

partnership to improve the lives of Marylanders."

The award was presented in Langley Park, where most of Mack's activism has centered for the past three decades. While Mack is known for the Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority, a business association, which he founded and chaired for more than 20 years, he is equally well known for working with community members from both Prince George's and Montgomery counties to make Langley Park, the area straddling both counties, safer for pedestrians. Before Mack's taskforce got involved, the New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard intersection was the third most dangerous in the state. The group lobbied for realignment of signals, bus stops, pedestrian crossings and put up fencing in the area to discourage the mostly new immigrant residents from dashing across the street to catch buses.

"You were so influential in that you did so much for public safety, for pedestrian safety and I don't believe the Purple line [above ground light rail] would be on the burner right now if the task force didn't lead the charge," Franchot said while presenting the award. He also noted that because of the good that came from Mack's taskforce, they planned to reinstate the group.

In addition to the award, Mack received a proclamation from the state of Maryland and a newly issued comptroller's medal. In accepting the award, Mack shared how honored he was for the recognition and his motivation for getting involved. "I'm a first-generation American," he said. "My parents were immigrants and I didn't learn to speak English until I was six years old. Folks who come to me from other cultures think I don't understand, but my response is 'I went through what you went through before your parents were born.' I know what it is like to live with parents who could not speak English ... So my heart went out to the people here who were being hurt by poor pedestrian habits."

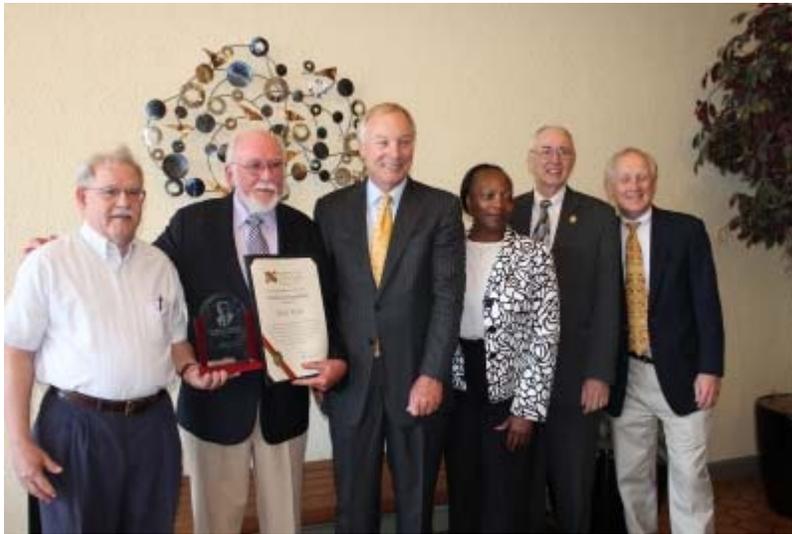
At 82 Mack is still a community activist as he chairs the Montgomery County Pedestrian Traffic Safety Committee. "I'm not supposed to sit in a rocking chair," he asserts. "There are things to be done because people my age have the experience do it!"

Wendell Osborne, a Sligo church member said, “Erwin is a good friend and I came here to support him. I think what Erwin has done is right in line with what we are studying—which is that Christians should be engaged in the community and be concerned with their neighbors who can’t help themselves.”

Terry Seamens, a city of Takoma Park councilman, met Mack in 1998 when he was considering running for office, said Mack has helped him “understand better how to help the community and how to help the community grow.”

Fred Schultz, another Takoma Park City councilman told Mack, “You deserve recognition for all you’ve done. Anytime I’m working with Erwin, he makes me feel younger. His energy, vision, doggedness—he will wear you out— is impressive. It is a privilege to be standing next to you.”

*Two years ago, at his retirement party, **Maryland’s governor and comptroller also presented Mack with a certificate of recognition** for his service.*



Erwin Mack is surrounded by government officials.