

THE USS MONTANA COMMITTEE

The MTHS Trustees honored the USS Montana Committee with the Heritage Guardian Award for instilling the U.S. Navy's newest submarine with a sense of place, history, and culture reflective of the Treasure State's heritage and values. The Committee, comprising diverse stakeholders from across the state, played a critical role in engaging closely with the Navy and imprinting the submarine's shared spaces with iconic Montana imagery. Common areas come alive with the spirit of the Big Sky through the artwork of Charlie Russell, a panorama of Glacier National Park in the Crew Mess, and an authentic ceremonial pipe made by Blackfeet artist Dwight Billedeaux.

The ship's bell, installed on the boat at its commissioning, is also rich with Montana symbolism and connection with the Navy. The bronze bell incorporates gold and silver from the Philipsburg and Butte areas as well as gold and silver dolphin pins, worn by qualified sailors, melted into the bronze. Before installation, Committee members traveled to towns across Montana to hold bell-ringing ceremonies in honor of all veterans.

Indigenous outreach played an important role in building support for the ship and included USS Montana crew member visits to veteran recognition ceremonies on Indian reservations in Montana. The commissioning ceremony and related events featured extensive Indigenous recognition, including flag and honor songs by Indigenous singers and drummers, a solemn blessing by a Tribal elder, Tribal flags, and presentation of the beautiful ceremonial pipe now displayed in the submarine.

The Committee's work has not ended with commissioning. Plans for a full-length documentary featuring the history of the USS Montana are underway with a goal of preserving an understanding of the ship's significance in Montana's history. In addition, the Committee will maintain an enduring bond through additional crew visits, veterans' recognition ceremonies, and a planned college scholarship fund for crew members.