

J. CHRISTOPHER COLLINS
2024 ISAIAH THOMAS AWARD HONOREE



J. Christopher Collins grew up in Walpole, MA. He was among the youngest of a large extended family of Irish and Italian descent. His parents both graduated from Norwood High School in 1935. Chris's mother was valedictorian of her class. She won 5 gold subject medals and the coveted Lane Medal which is still awarded today to the top academic student at Norwood High School. Despite his mother's accomplished academic career, she did not have the opportunity to attend college while his father attended Holy Cross. His parents taught Chris the value and importance of education, a lesson that would inspire much of his future community service.

Worcester was always part of the Collins family stories because not only his father, but his father's two older brother attended Holy Cross. Worcester was a seemingly far away city on a hill – the home of Holy Cross. One of his first memories of Worcester is a particular Holy Cross football game where the weather was particularly “Worcestering” and his dad, who never wore a hat, reluctantly pulled up the hood of his nylon jacket to block out the sleet and the rain and the wind.

Somehow, despite that anecdote of the tough Worcester weather, Chris followed his brother Michael to Holy Cross where he learned first hand the value of a Jesuit, liberal arts education. Chris feels passionately for this type of high-quality education of the whole person, intellectually, socially, and spiritually; combining personal development with a dedication to serve others and a deep understanding of the human condition. Values he developed at Holy Cross and has carried with him throughout his career.

Chris credits much of his commitment to service to his family, his hometown of Walpole, his education at Holy Cross and his formative experiences at The Paul Revere Life Insurance Company which instilled in him a deep sense of community. Paul Revere exhibited its role in Worcester as a faithful and careful neighbor and expected its employees to take an active role in the community. He started his career there January 16, 1984.



Paul Revere was acquired by Provident Companies and then merged with Unum. With each transition, Chris grew professionally until becoming General Counsel for Unum's US Operations and then ultimately serving as Of Counsel at Mirick O'Connell in the Life, Health, Disability, and ERISA Litigation Group.

Throughout his 40-year career in Worcester, Chris has embodied the ideals of the Isaiah Thomas Award through his commitment to “distinguished community service.” He has served on numerous non-profit boards, with thousands feeling the impacts of his time, his talent, and his treasure.

Chris led efforts to give the Paul Revere silver collection to the Worcester Art Museum, preserving the history of these pieces and moving them from a private company to a public venue to be enjoyed by all.

At a time when many companies were leaving the downtown, Chris understood the role of a vibrant and thriving downtown. Working with the City of Worcester, under Chris' leadership, Unum became the anchor tenant at CitySquare, ensuring that hundreds of employees would remain in downtown Worcester for

years to come and helped to leverage additional tenants in the new construction replacing the Galleria.

He served for many years as a board member with The Bridge of Central Massachusetts. The Bridge later merged with Alternatives Unlimited affiliation to form Open Sky Community Services. After years of service to the agency, including leading The Bridge's capital campaign in 2003, enabling the renovation of a factory building on Mann Street to become the new headquarters for The Bridge and home to its G. Stanley Hall School. In honor of his long-time service, The Bridge named its main administrative building the J. Christopher Collins Building, now home to OpenSky Community Services.

He led the first ever capital campaign for ArtsWorcester, Framing the Future, which raised \$1.25 million for the organization ensuring their relocation to the downtown in the Printers Building along Portland Street, a much more accessible and visible location for their artists and visitors and building out its technical capacity for contemporary art practices.

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Chris is presently a member of the Council of the American Antiquarian Society which was founded by Isaiah Thomas himself. He is also a Trustee at the College of the Holy Cross.

While many of these accomplishments are outstanding, Chris is most proud of his work with the Nativity School of Worcester, ensuring young men from across the city and from all backgrounds receive a first-class Jesuit inspired educational experience tuition-free. Chris served on the Board from 2011 to 2020, serving as Board Chair for 7 years. He is now leading Access & Impact: The Campaign for Nativity School of Worcester. After 20 years of success, the Nativity School Campaign Committee, helmed by Co-Chair Chris Collins, is raising \$20 million to open the Julie Power Girls Division, to ensure young women in Worcester receive the same opportunity to thrive and develop into future well rounded leaders.

Chris and his wife Catherine live in Sterling Massachusetts. They are the proud parents of two children, Sarah and Daniel Collins. Both children are married. Sarah to Tony Perry and Daniel to Carolyn Henderson. Both couples live in Los Angeles.

Today, we acknowledge and show appreciation for Chris' extraordinary commitment to Worcester and to its people. He has shown that personal success must be joined to the well-being of the community. We can, and should, all learn lessons from Chris' perseverance, sacrifices, and devotion to others. While Isaiah Thomas is marked as Worcester's "first great citizen," Chris Collins has established himself as 2024's Isaiah Thomas Award Citizen of the Year for his profound impacts on Worcester over the past 40 years.

