

Best & Brightest

There are lots of smart, talented people in the Washington area. But who are the world-class Washingtonians—those who set the standard in their fields?

We found scores of such people in places expected and unexpected. You might not guess Washington is home to a crossword-puzzle champion, an internationally renowned bagpipe band, or a snail farmer whose product is coveted by four-star restaurants.

We've singled out 50 individuals and groups who are among the finest in the world at what they do. Artists, scientists, scholars, and other experts—some you've heard of and some you probably haven't, but all are known and respected across the United States and abroad.

Here's a chance to meet them, to learn what inspires their work and drives them to excellence.

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Big Subjects on the Big Screen

CHARLES GUGGENHEIM

Filmmaker

CHARLES GUGGENHEIM TAKES ON BIG subjects. The Allied invasion of Normandy. The First Amendment.

And he owes it all to a puppet.

The filmmaker's debut behind a movie camera was as director of a

1950 TV series starring a marionette version of the comic-strip character Fearless Fosdick.

Guggenheim—at the time an office boy who dreamed of getting into TV or radio production—had been dispatched by his boss, TV executive Louis G. Cowan, to salvage a job botched by Cowan's brother.

"I'd never shot a movie," says Guggenheim, 77, who lives and works in DC. "But there was a cameraman there who knew what shots to take. That's how I learned film."

Fast forward to 1965, when Guggenheim won the first of four Academy Awards—and the first of 12 nominations—for *Nine From Little Rock*, a documentary about the integration of Central High in Arkansas. Oscars for *Robert F. Kennedy Remembered*, *The Johnstown Flood*, and *A Time for Justice* followed.

One technique Guggenheim is known for is having people from historical events speak in voice-over, without identification, as he did in 1994's *D-Day Remembered*.

"If you want to transport people to the way it was," Guggenheim says of *D-Day*, "and you cut to a guy who was there when he was 19 and now he's 75, down in Florida with a string tie, the audience is thrust out of that."

Guggenheim, a World War II veteran, can get transported by that film himself.

"Someone said that 80 percent of the success of a film is what people bring to the theater with them," he says. "There's a moment in *D-Day* when they're getting on the ship the night before. There's a shot of a young infantryman who's 18 years old. I see in his face every fear I ever had."

Guggenheim's current project, *GI Holocaust*, tells of a Nazi prison camp with hundreds of American Jewish soldiers—some from Guggenheim's infantry division. He was in the hospital at the time and escaped capture.

With a long career behind him but far from over, Guggenheim dismisses talk of a legacy.

"It's presumptuous to think you leave one at all," he says. "You do what you can do. You feel blessed if other people think it's worthwhile."

—WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

