

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MISSION BELONGING AND STRATHMORE PRESENT A TWO-DAY WEEKEND OF ART, HEALING, AND COMMUNITY

*United Against Silence, an evening event on Friday, Sept. 18,
and A Day of Belonging, a full-day program on Saturday, Sept. 19*

Rockville, Md. – Aug. 19, 2026 — [Mission Belonging](#) and [Strathmore](#) are proud to co-present a powerful two-day weekend experience bringing together veterans, military families, and community members for an immersive celebration of healing, creativity, and human connection. The weekend features two distinct events in Montgomery County: [United Against Silence](#), an intimate evening gathering at the [Mansion at Strathmore](#) in North Bethesda, and [A Day of Belonging](#), a full-day arts and wellness festival at [Rockwood Manor](#) in Potomac.

Together, these events reflect Mission Belonging's ongoing commitment to fostering belonging, reducing isolation, and supporting the well-being of those who have served and those who love them. As a multidimensional creative anchor in the DMV area, Strathmore joins this effort to amplify voices and curate experiences to enrich every life and shape stronger communities.

United Against Silence: A Mission Belonging Evening of Poetry and Performances

Hosted by Seema Reza and Ryan Artes

Join Mission Belonging and Strathmore for *United Against Silence*, a community showcase featuring an evening of poetry and performances by the Mission Belonging community, hosted by **Seema Reza** and **Ryan Artes**. Light refreshments will be served. Due to the sensitivity of some of the content and limited space, this event is only for ages 16 and older.

This event is free and open to all (ages 16+). Donations are accepted and will help offset travel costs for facilitators and veteran participants attending *A Day of Belonging*.

The performance lineup for *United Against Silence* will be announced.

- **Date:** Friday, Sept. 18, 2026
- **Time:** 7: – 8:30 p.m. EDT
- **Location:** The Mansion at Strathmore, 10701 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852
- **Admission:** Free (donations welcome)
- **Refreshments:** Light refreshments provided
- **Age Guidance:** Ages 16 and older
- **RSVP:** [Registration Required](#)

Hosts

Seema Reza

Seema Reza (she/her) is the author of *A Constellation of Half-Lives* and *When the World Breaks Open*. Her writing appears widely in national publications and has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She teaches and performs across the country, bringing poetry into classrooms, jails, hospitals, universities, and community spaces.

Ryan Artes

Ryan Jafar Artes (he/she/they) is an activist, memoirist, and poet whose work reimagines culture through the lens of a transracial, transnational South Asian Indian American adoptee. Their writing appears in *Panorama* and multiple anthologies, with honors including the Grand Prize for Poetry in upEND Movement's Dream, Create, Liberate contest. Artes hosts The Adoptee Open Mic and teaches virtual writing classes that support their ongoing activism and art.

A Day of Belonging: A Full Day In-Person Community Event Co-Presented by Mission Belonging and Strathmore

Mission Belonging's 4th Annual community gathering, *A Day of Belonging*, returns with this year's theme: **Joy**.

This special event invites veterans, active duty military, their spouses and caregivers, and community members to come together for a day of connection, creativity, and celebration. It will be a day of professionally facilitated expressive arts workshops, performances, and readings showcasing the work and talent of artists from the military and veteran communities. The program invites participants to connect authentically and explore their own voice through creative writing, improv, visual art, and music.

Workshops will include demonstrations, group discussions facilitated by the workshop leader, and time for participants to create and, if desired, share work in a low-pressure environment that encourages supportive feedback.

There is a \$5 non-refundable registration fee for this event. Donations are accepted and will help offset travel costs for facilitators and veteran participants. For the most up-to-date information, please visit missionbelonging.org/dayofbelonging.

- **Date:** Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026
- **Time:** 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. EDT
- **Location:** Rockwood Manor Retreats & Events, 11001 MacArthur Blvd, Potomac, MD 20854
- **Registration Fee:** \$5 (non-refundable)
- **Refreshments:** Breakfast and Lunch provided.
- **Age Guidance:** Ages 16 and older
- **RSVP:** [Purchase Tickets Online](https://missionbelonging.org/dayofbelonging)

Workshops

Participants may choose from a variety of immersive, hands-on workshops throughout the day:

- Wood Burning
- Paper Clay
- Crepe Paper Flowers
- Artist Trading Cards
- Paper Making
- Painting
- Cyanotypes
- Meditation
- Poetry Circle
- Improv
- Music

Keynote Speaker

Col.(ret) Jess Bunin, MD, MHPE

This year's keynote address will be delivered by **Colonel (Retired) Jess Bunin, MD, MHPE** (she/her), a distinguished physician, educator, and leader whose career has spanned military service and medical education. Col.Bunin brings a unique perspective on healing, resilience, and the intersection of medicine and human experience. With advanced training in both clinical medicine and health professions education, Col, Bunin has dedicated her career to the well-being of those who serve and the communities that support them. Her keynote address will explore themes of joy, belonging, and the transformative power of community.

Performers

A Day of Belonging will feature an extraordinary lineup of live performers whose work bridges music, spoken word, and the human spirit:

Wytold

Wytold (he/him), a Strathmore [Artists in Residence](#) alum (Class of 2013), is a composer and cellist whose genre-defying work weaves together classical, experimental, and improvised music. Known for his deeply evocative performances, Wytold creates soundscapes that invite listeners into moments of reflection, wonder, and emotional resonance. His work has appeared in concert halls, galleries, and community spaces, always bringing an intimate and transformative quality to every performance.

Christylez Bacon

Christylez Bacon (he/him), pronounced chris-styles, is a Grammy-nominated progressive hip-hop artist, multi-instrumentalist, and Strathmore [Artists in Residence](#) alum (Class of 2008), from Washington, D.C. Blending storytelling with djembe, guitar, and human beatbox, he champions cultural unity through music. He has performed with major symphony orchestras, collaborated with Yo-Yo Ma, and became the first Hip-Hop artist featured at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Bacon also founded the cross-cultural Washington Sound Museum and created the international Beatbox Remix Series during the pandemic.

Kofi Dennis

Kofi Dennis (he/him) is a master drummer and Early Childhood Arts-Integration Specialist who leads family workshops, professional trainings, and school and library residencies nationwide. A longtime Wolf Trap master teaching artist, he has guided New Artists Training since 2005. He is also a well-known storyteller and musician who frequently performs in museums, libraries, and schools. Dennis trained at the University of Ghana's School of Performing Arts and studied Early Childhood Education at Komenda College, University of Cape Coast.

Support & Acknowledgments of Day of Belonging Sponsors

- [Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County](#)
- [Walter Reed Society](#)
- [Maryland State Arts Council \(msac.org\)](https://msac.org)

Mission Belonging is supported in part by funding from the Montgomery County Government and the Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County.

About Mission Belonging

Mission Belonging connects veterans, healthcare providers, and civilians through workshops led by professional artists who reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Through online and in-person programs, Mission Belonging builds connected communities where veterans and civilians share creative expression, mutual understanding, and support. Our art and poetry workshops have reached tens of thousands of service members, veterans, military family members, caregivers, and healthcare workers — led by a prestigious faculty of award-winning writers, artists, and musicians who have taught at institutions from Columbia University to Stanford and performed worldwide. Mission Belonging encourages the use of arts as a tool for narration, self-care, and socialization for those affected by trauma. Follow [Mission Belonging](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [Patreon](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

About Strathmore

Since 1983, Strathmore has enriched lives through transformative artistic experiences and meaningful community connections. Based in North Bethesda, Md., this nonprofit cultural institution showcases world-class talent, supports emerging artists, and offers diverse programs at its Music Center and Mansion, as well as across Montgomery County. Strathmore fosters creativity and community through performance, educational initiatives, and accessible arts programming. Experience the magic of Strathmore, where the arts are everywhere. Follow [Strathmore](#) on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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