

Baltimoreans

of the
year

IT IS EACH FALL, WHEN WE START CONSIDERING our Baltimoreans of the Year nominations, that we are reminded just how rich the region is in men and women of achievement.

This year, the choices were as tough as ever: We had to whittle away at an early list that included dozens of scientists, politicians, athletes, neighborhood activists, athletes, public servants, business people, philanthropists, artists, and more. But our final list is a convincing one, spotlighting a few Baltimoreans who made some very significant contributions to our quality of life in the past year.

Their stories are all very different: They are tales of vision, courage, community spirit, generosity, or stand-out talent. And, in some cases, just old-fashioned grit.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID COLWELL



SENATOR PAUL SARBANES

You'd never find him on the nightly news, thumping a podium or gushing hackneyed rhetoric on the steps of Congress. Instead, he's usually sequestered in his Hart Building office (kept company by busts of Zeus and Socrates), where he works far from the television cameras—and the spectre of "special interests."

In fact, before last year, the 69-year-old Paul Spyros Sarbanes's last sound bite probably came during the Watergate hearings, on which he worked as a first-term Representative. But in 2002, responding to corporate collapses and accounting misdeeds, Sarbanes managed to help craft and pass a piece of consumer-protection legislation that marched right past the powerful business lobbies, which had (for once) been struck speechless by accounting scandals from Enron and WorldCom. It was a bill known as S. 2673: The Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act (later known as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002).

Put simply, it's designed to keep companies from covering their own (and each other's) fiscal dalliances, makes executives personally responsible for the numbers in their annual reports, and makes sure investors get better and more accurate information about a company's fiscal health.

"The President characterized it as the most important financial reform since the 1930s," Sarbanes notes without a trace of gloating.

The longtime former member of the Maryland House of Delegates has done quite a lot in the past three decades he has served in Congress. He's drafted bills and legislation which steadfastly protect regular people and their homes and health (he's introduced or co-sponsored the Patient's Bill of Rights, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and brownfields legislation). And talk about

propriety: Except for a mutual fund, Sarbanes didn't even own stock until 1999. He still has a home in Baltimore City ("in either North Waverly or South Guilford," he says, ever the canny politician), and still sticks to the lessons learned as the child of Greek immigrants.

He was born in Salisbury to Spyros and Matina Sarbanes, who ran the town's Mayflower Grill restaurant (where Paul worked as a teenager). Sarbanes attended Princeton University on a scholarship, and graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa—then went on to Oxford University (where he met his wife of 42 years, Christine) and Harvard Law. A decade spent working as a Baltimore lawyer ended in 1970 with his first election to Congress.

It was his decades of wise, considerate, and intelligent statesmanship that built Sarbanes's reputation within his own party (and the GOP) as a dedicated and fair legislator. And by laying that groundwork, Sarbanes managed to shepherd the reform bill through a once-hostile Congress and a pro-business White House which clearly read the anti-corporate-greed sentiments on the public wall.

When the 108th Congress convenes this month, Sarbanes and his fellow Democrats are back in the minority. But he won't let that prevent him from battling for his favorite causes—fighting predatory lending, ensuring financial privacy, cleaning up the Chesapeake, and access to affordable housing, to name a few.

His unassuming style has earned him the snarky nickname "The Invisible Senator"—but it's also made him one of Congress's most effective legislators. Says Sarbanes, "I realized a long time ago that if you share credit, or even let others take it, you get more done."

—Abigail Green