



Media Release

Guardians of Culture and Lifeways International Awards Announcement

Oklahoma City, OK, April 17, 2012 - The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) today announced the winners of its 2012 Guardians of Culture and Lifeways International Awards.

Established in 2007, the awards program identifies and recognizes organizations and individuals who serve as outstanding examples of how indigenous archives, libraries, and museums contribute to the vitality and cultural sovereignty of Native nations. Nine award recipients will be honored at a luncheon ceremony on Tuesday, June 5, opening day of the International Conference of Indigenous Archives, Libraries, and Museums that is taking place at the Cherokee-owned Hard Rock Casino and Hotel in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The award ceremony is open to conference attendees, guests of the awardees, and credentialed media representatives.

An Awards Council, consisting of 14 individuals from cultural institutions across the nation, reviewed a record number of nominations. The Awards Council selected nine recipients in the following categories:

Lifetime Achievement, which honors an individual whose work has significantly contributed to the preservation and understanding of indigenous cultural heritage, is awarded to **Richard West**, founding director and director emeritus of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. West is a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and a Peace Chief of the Southern Cheyenne. Now retired from NMAI, West serves as consultant to international cultural institutions and is Of Counsel to Stetson Law Offices, P.C., where he focuses primarily on Native art and culture issues.

Leadership, which honors an indigenous individual with exceptional ability to lead and inspire, is awarded to **Sven Haakanson**, Executive Director of the Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak, Alaska. Haakanson is recognized for his leadership in preserving and giving contemporary meaning to Native history and local legends, rituals, and customs. Bridging cultures and continents, Haakanson has made collections more accessible to Native communities by researching objects in the world's museums and developing traveling exhibits and educational resources around the information they hold. Through these and other activities, Haakanson is preserving and reviving ancient traditions and heritage, celebrating the rich past of Alutiiq communities, and providing the larger world with a valuable window into a little-known culture.

Outstanding Project, which recognizes projects that greatly benefit indigenous peoples, is awarded to the **Plateau Peoples' Web Portal**, an interactive, online digital archive that provides access to Plateau peoples' cultural materials at Washington State University through tribal curation (<http://libarts.wsu.edu/plateaucenter/portal>). The Portal provides a way for tribal communities to include their own knowledge and memories of digital materials for various collections. This project is an inspiring model of how university repositories can successfully collaborate with tribal communities to curate and enhance collections with tribal voices and histories. Receiving the award on behalf of the project is **Kim Christen**, Associate Professor at Washington State University and project director.

Archives Institutional Excellence, which recognizes indigenous archival organizations that demonstrate a significant commitment to the preservation and use of documentary heritage, is awarded to the **Colorado River Indian Tribes Library (CRIT)** and its archivist **Amelia Flores**. Organized in 1958, the CRIT Archives was the first tribally-based archive in the state of Arizona and now serves as the central research center for knowledge about the the four tribes of the Colorado River Indian Reservation. The CRIT Archives is a model for managing Indigenous knowledge. While embracing a spirit of inclusivity, archives staff members ensure that collections are maintained to the highest archival standards and are accessible to the public in accordance with tribal protocols. Archive staff members actively engage in acquiring new materials, implements community oral history and language documentation projects, and routinely contributes to educating non-tribal archivists about issues surrounding Native archival materials.

Library Institutional Excellence, which recognizes an indigenous library that profoundly demonstrates outstanding service to its community, is awarded to the **Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma** in Perkins, Oklahoma, its library director, **Sandy Tharp-Thee**, and **Iowa Tribe Business Committee, Janice Rowe-Kurak, Chairman**. In three short years, the library has evolved from an organization with no budget and no viable programs to a well-funded organization that is considered an “essential service.” The library now sponsors programs such as "Standing Together," a culturally relevant collection representing all Oklahoma tribes; a dedicated webpage that engages the community in library programs; a weekly Storytime reading program in partnership with the Four Winds Child Development Center; a reading promotion program in partnership with Sonic Corporation; Summer Outreach activities that include working with Oklahoma Department of Libraries to encourage reading, gardening, art and fishing for the eagles, part of the Iowa Tribe eagle rehabilitation program, a Writer's Group, “Writers in the Wind”, that meets monthly to work on projects; Author Visit Programs with noted Native and Non-Native authors; a First Book program and Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Ready to Read and Early Literacy program, that helps children establish personal home libraries; a Starting Points program that pays for testing fees and provides training to help individuals obtain GEDs, literacy, education, career and employment opportunities. Community Outreach program targeted to the special needs of homebound elders; a One Car-One Student program where salvaged cars are recycled to pay for testing fees for GED students; an early literacy program known as "Fun in a Sack" that features kits with books, puzzles videos, and other learning tools; Working with the Iowa Tribe Cultural Preservation and Recreation to create “Living Books” recording history for future Iowa generations. Partnership with the Oklahoma Historical Society to digitize older tribal newspapers. Partnering with Iowa Tribe Bison Program, creating traveling education exhibition for outreach to schools and community. The library works closely with the JOM program assisting with tutoring of children and shares online, education, employment and career resources with five public libraries and one school library. Sandy is a member of American Indian Library Association, ALA, OLA, serves on the Oklahoma Library Tribal Committee and serves on the Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Board of Directors representing the Iowa Tribe.

Museum Institutional Excellence, which recognizes Indigenous museums and museum services that demonstrate significant commitment to the care, preservation, interpretation, and presentation of material cultural heritage, is awarded to the **Cherokee Heritage Center** in Tahlequah, Oklahoma and its President **Mary Ellen Meredith**. Since 1964, the Cherokee Heritage Center (CHC) has preserved, promoted, and taught Cherokee history and culture. Situated on forty-nine historically significant wooded acres, the CHC is on the National Register of Historic Places. It maintains an Ancient Village, a populated re-creation of a 1700's Cherokee village; the Cherokee National Museum, which contains award winning permanent and changing exhibits; the Cherokee National Archives and Family Research

Center, and Adams Corner, a reconstructed 19th century Indian Territory community with appropriate crops and animals. The Heritage Center supports field trips for students of all cultural backgrounds, provides guided exhibit tours, and sponsors interactive storytelling, arts and crafts activities, and cultural games. It sponsors Ancient Cherokee Days and Indian Territory Days for the public, as well as classes that provide historical and practical information on Cherokee lifeways, including pottery, feather cape making, beadwork, baskets, moccasins, flintknapping, and more. Of note, the Cherokee Heritage Center is a major supporter of Cherokee artists, authors, and performers. It promotes Cherokee arts through two major shows a year, features the work of Cherokee artists in its museum store, and publishes significant works on Cherokee culture through the Cherokee Heritage Press.

Honored One, which recognizes indigenous or non-indigenous individuals or organizations whose contributions have significantly benefited the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage and supported the work of tribal archives, libraries, and museums, is awarded to three people: attorney, author and Native-rights activist **Walter Echo-Hawk**, Oklahoma State Librarian **Susan McVey**, and the **Institute of Museum and Library Services**, a federal agency.

Walter Echo-Hawk, a lawyer, tribal judge, scholar and activist, is honored for his work in support of indigenous archives, libraries, and museums. Echo-Hawk advocates that every tribal nation maintain its own cultural institutions. As Chair of the 2012 International Conference of Indigenous Archives, Libraries, and Museums and an active board member of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, he is working to elevate the status of archives, libraries, and museums with tribal leaders and decision makers at all levels.

Susan McVey, Director of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, a state agency, has made significant and exceptional contributions to tribal communities throughout Oklahoma and the nation. On a national level, since 2006 she has supported the development of training opportunities that serve thousands of Native archivists, librarians, and museum workers. On a statewide level, Susan McVey has shown an unprecedented commitment to serving the needs of tribal libraries through the generous sharing of State Agency resources such as interlibrary loan, national database subscriptions, and Summer Reading resources. Additionally, ODL provides training and networking opportunities, as well as funding for tribal archives programs. Under her leadership, many Oklahoma tribes have established archives and preservation plans. ODL also assists tribal libraries with adult literacy programs, GED testing, and reading programs for people of all ages. ODL maintains an extensive collection of Native materials, including rare language instruction programs.

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and Senior Program Officers **Mary Alice Ball**, **Kevin Cherry**, **Alison Freese**, and **Sandra Narva**, as well as Director **Susan Hildreth**, are recognized for their support of tribal libraries and museums. A leader in supporting tribal library and museum development in the United States, IMLS provides several categories of funding specifically for tribal museums and libraries. IMLS also supports educational programs, including those sponsored by the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums.

For more information on the awards program, including a list of past recipients, visit www.atalm.org.

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Media Contact

Susan Feller, President
Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums
405-522-3259

susanfeller@msn.com