

HEROES

Heroes Awards 2008—2009

The word “Hero” brings to mind a legendary Native warrior, lance lowered, riding fearlessly toward the enemy. Today the “Hero” is no less a warrior, but may be armed only with words, a smile, or even a basket of apples. These special people nourish our communities through their giving spirits, they are our advocates, and they help build our future by acting as models for our young people.

The “Heroes” Project was conceived by the late Dr. Alan Allery and developed through the National Resource Center on Native American Aging at the University of North Dakota and the Administration on Aging. The project is a forum to recognize individuals who have impacted the lives of Native elders in local communities throughout the continental United States, Alaska and Hawaii. We are proud to share the stories of 37 extraordinary individuals who are the recipients of the Hero Award.

Seven of our Heroes chose not to be recognized individually. They are leaders and followers, tall and short, young and old. Everyone of them saw a need and could not look away. They heeded the voices of their ancestors, drew on their inner strength, and stepped forward to help. Some worked with heads high and banners flying. Others were barely noticed but their impact has been great. We honor them all.



Isaac Akootchook

is a Hero. He was born in Arey Island, Alaska, and has been a lifelong subsistence hunter, whaler, and fisherman. Schooled in the oral tradition of the Inupiaq culture, language, and life by his parents and self-taught in the ways of western society, he encourages his family to work hard and seek knowledge; keep going to school, keep learning, and go forward. Isaac Akootchook was part of a group that incorporated the Native City Council of Kaktovik and through the years he has represented Kaktovik with dignity, honesty and most of all loyalty to his Inupiaq people.

In his life, Isaak Akootchook has seen his environment go from one extreme to the other: from a natural environment far removed from western society to a modern village with a thriving economy. Native people must live in two worlds with one soul – balancing traditional ways of life with those of the western world. Mr. Akootchook has managed to achieve this balance, serving as mentor, leader, and visionary for future generations. His wisdom, faith, and loyalty will live on through his 6 children, 16 grandchildren, 36 great grandchildren and 4 great great grandchildren. His spirit will continue to nourish the Inupiaq people for many generations to come. Isaac Akootchook is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Rose Ambrose

is a Hero. As an Athabascan from Husila she represents not only the Tanana Chiefs Conference but Denkkanaaga, the regional elder council whose office is in Fairbanks. She has been a strong spokeswoman for her tribe and for elders in general for over 30 years.

Rose Ambrose has worked for her tribal organization as a community health aid from the time it was officially designated as a federally recognized tribe. She is an Athabascan tradition bearer who works tirelessly to pass on her knowledge of Athabascan Native ways of knowing and cultural values to the next generation. Rose Ambrose is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Ed Ben

is a Hero. He is a traditional dancer, drum maker, and great father, husband, uncle, and brother. He influences our young people by helping them learn our language and traditions, and mentors those who seek his assistance and advice. Ben is a leader in our community and helped write our tribal constitution.

Many in our community heat their homes with a wood stove. Ed has been hauling wood to elders in Salem, Willamette Valley, Wilsonville and Siletz, Oregon, for 15 to 20 years. All he asks in return is that someone help him unload the wood. All of Ed's 3 sons follow in their father's footsteps. One was a great hunter and fisherman. He hunted for the elders and those who could not hunt on their own helping them to provide food for their families. He has crossed over but his kindness will be long remembered. Another son helps cut and haul wood to the elders. Another son is a traditional dancer and is passing the tradition on to his family.

Ed Ben was raised to be an active part of his community. He helps out of the goodness of his heart. His good work continues through his family and in the many hearts and hands warmed by his efforts. Ed Ben is a Hero.

Nominated by Shirley Walker



Kay Branch

is a Hero. She is the sole elder care coordinator in the Alaska Native Health Consortium that represents all of the regional health organizations; and nationally she works on long term care with Dr. Bruce Fink at the Indian Health Service. She also organizes the Joint Alaska Native Elder Advisory Committee meetings for the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and the National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Natibe Hawaiian Elders. Branch has also worked as part of the state elder services program and represents Alaska Native elders at national elder health conferences .

During her time with the Bristol Bay Native Association in Dillingham the Yup'ik Elders were so taken with her that they gave her a Yup'ik name, Arnayagaq (Little Woman). Kay Branch works tirelessly for the Alaska Native elders and speaks for them at every opportunity. Her contributions enrich the lives of Alaska Elders and in the words of Dr. Charles, "I wish that there were more people like her. She should be cloned if it was possible." Kay Branch is a Hero.

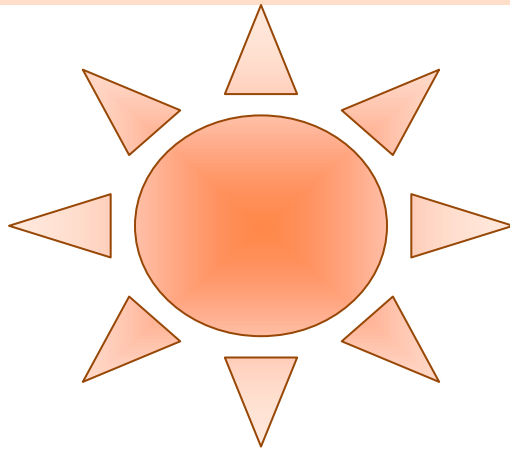
Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Connie Bremner

is a Hero. When Connie became director of the Blackfeet Eagle Shield Center in 1994 she immediately realized there was work to be done. First she obtained a grant to purchase a delivery vehicle with hot and cool cargo space for 124 meals. Next she received funding for an Alzheimer's demonstration program through which she instituted the Safe Return Program. Realizing that the vast distances on the Blackfeet land left many elders isolated without access to personal care, Bremner developed the first tribal-run Personal Care Attendant Program in the nation. Caregivers trained by Bremner's staff provide services to approximately 100 seniors and the attendant jobs have boosted the economy of the reservation.

One of her greatest achievements is the new Eagle Shield Center. The building has a large dining room, state of the art kitchen, 5 spacious offices, and a beautiful Atrium surrounded by 16 one bedroom apartments. When asked how she managed to produce such a vibrant, multi-faceted senior program in a community with so few material resources, Bremner chuckles, "You know, if you let the water drip on a rock long enough, it will wear it away." Connie Bremner kept "dripping" on that rock till she brought adequate services and independent living to elders on the reservation. Connie Bremner is a Hero.



Sophia Chase

is a Hero. She was born in Goose Bay, a village on Iliamna Lake, Alaska, and was tragically taken from us in January of 2008. She sat on the board of the Southcentral Foundation for more than 20 years and represented the Foundation on the Alaska Native Elder Health Advisory Committee.

She worked tirelessly to improve health care in Native villages throughout Alaska. Her advocacy on behalf of the elders will be sorely missed. Continuing her work will be the greatest tribute we can pay to her. Sophia Chase is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Gregorita Chavarria

is a Hero. Born in August, 1905, she spent her life supporting improvements to her community. Determined to live her own life independently, her dream was to prevent institutionalization of community members who wished to remain at home in the care of loving family. Toward this end she worked tirelessly to establish a Regional Adult Day Care Facility on the reservation at Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. Gregorita passed away in June of 2008, but she lived to see the ground breaking for "Gregorita's Dream" in the spring of 2008. When the care center opens in 2009 it will be the only one on tribal land and the only one in the state of New Mexico.

Gregorita's loving heart, kind words, and gentle manner touched the hearts and souls of all who met her. Her coherent mind and tri-lingual (Tewa, English, Spanish) daily conversations with community members encouraged a sense of culture and tradition. The memory of her love, given so freely while she lived, will be with the community for generations to come. Gregorita Chavarria is a Hero.

*Nominated by Geraldine Mascarenas-Cain,
Faustina Suazo, and Doris Tenorio*



Helen Cummings

is a Hero. She has been passionate about helping people throughout her entire life. Besides raising a large family of her own, she took in 16 American Indian foster children who needed someone to love and care for them. Helen worked as a nurse for the Indian Health Service, then returned to the Leech Lake Reservation as part of the WIC and Elderly Nutrition Programs. Since retiring she has volunteered endlessly and worked on state and national projects related to aging. Helen speaks the original Ojibway language fluently and stresses the importance of passing on the Ojibway language and culture to young people.

In Helen's own words, "Life is a never ending process of learning. You learn every day if you keep an open mind and interest in the world around us. With all this modern technology, there is no end to learning. We must encourage all our children and young people to higher education if they are to survive not only in the mainstream society, but we must also stress family unity, responsibility, respect, honesty, and being trustworthy. We must also return to family caring and sharing, not only to our families, but to our friends and neighbors as well." Helen Cummings is a Hero.

Nominated by Mary Snobl and Jackie Dionne



Dr. Cheryl Easley

is a Hero. She is Dean of the College of Health and Social Welfare at the University of Alaska Anchorage, President of the American Public Health Association, and a member of that organization's American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Caucus. Dr. Easley has been a firm supporter of the National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders with numerous in-kind services and funds from its beginning. She is the most traveled Dean in the history of UAA. Braving the cold and darkness of winter, she has been to Point Barrow, Nome, Kotzebue, Fairbanks, Dillingham, New Stuyahok, Bethel, Napaskiak, Juneau, Sitka, Metlakatla, Kodiak, and St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea meeting with Alaska Native people.

Dr. Easley has a deep and abiding belief in giving the best health care services to Alaska's people. We thank her for choosing to make Alaska her home. She is a true friend of the Alaska Native, American Indian, and Native Hawaiian Elders. Dr. Cheryl Easley is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Leroy Elliott

is a Hero. He is a member of the Manzanita Kumayaay Reservation in California and he sits on the board of directors for Southern Indian Health Council, Inc. Most important Elliott is a keeper of tribal culture. He sings the old Native Tribal "Bird Songs" which were sung hundreds of years ago. He honors the elders and others in our community by singing at funerals , tribal events and even national events. Singing and dancing tribal songs at a Kumeyaay funeral is very difficult: not sleeping for 24 hours, as well as the other cultural rules that he follows. He continues through storms and 105 degree weather sustained by his incredible spirit.

Leroy Elliott is an inspiration to all who see him and know him. He has nourished the Kumeyaay people. He teaches young people the songs and shares with them the old Tribal stories. His legacy will live on through all who have heard his stories and through the young people who have learned his songs. Leroy Elliott is a Hero.

Nominated by Gilbert Pablo



Monte Fox

is a Hero. Monte began his work on the White Earth Reservation in 2000. He began immediately developing programs and services specifically for White Earth elders. His goal was to increase their activity and motivate them to take control of their health. Monte developed a special time at area fitness centers for “elders only” exercise and trained his staff to work with this group. Under Monte’s leadership the Diabetes Project holds nutrition classes, helps with the elders menu planning and provides individual nutrition counseling. At the Diabetes Camp Monte created, elders gather to exercise, eat healthy, play “Diabetes Bingo” and “Honor the Beat” (both games developed specifically with a strong cultural component), share stories and become knowledgeable about diabetes. He has addressed the transportation issue on the reservation by adding vans and providing transportation for his clients in need.

Monte’s humble approach and his respect for the cultural mores of the White Earth elders have enabled him to reach record numbers of people during his tenure. The elders hold him in very high regard. Monte Fox is a Hero.

Nominated by Carol Fabre



Nancy J. Furlow

is a Hero. Nancy is Interim Director of the Alaska Native Studies Department at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She is making a meaningful contribution to the cultural knowledge of Alaska Natives in her classes, "Cultural Knowledge of Alaska Native Elders" and "Alaska Native Cultural Perspectives". The classes teach respect and honor for Alaska Native elders. The elders are recognized as scholars and wisdom keepers in a university setting where they teach and interact with the students. She encourages young people to become strong and effective speakers through the Alaska Native Oratory Society and she is part of "The Ice – Pod" program that encourages Alaska Native students to pursue their Masters and Ph.D. degrees.

Nancy Furlow works every day to educate and inspire the next generation of Alaska Native leaders. She is an elder in training who quietly and tirelessly works behind the scenes to insure that Alaska Native cultural values and Native Ways of Knowing are taught and documented for the next generation of Alaskans both Native and non-Native. Nancy J. Furlow is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Janet Guthrie

is a Hero. She started out as a janitor in the Metlakatla Senior Center and has been Director of the Center for over 30 years. Her grant writing ability has helped fund the Title VI and Title III programs during her tenure. She is currently responsible for services for congregate and home delivery meals, transportation, shopping, escort assistance, and she also coordinates the Family Caregiver, Diabetic and Home Health programs.

Janet Guthrie is Tshimshian from Metlakatla, Alaska, an Indian community of about 1600 members. She has served on the board of the National Indian Council on Aging; she was one of the original members of AgeNet, a member of the Metlakatla Community Development Committee, a Commissioner in the Metlakatla Housing Authority, and she has served as a board member for NICOA for over 20 years. Her life of service has greatly enhanced the lives of the Metlakatla elders and serves as an inspiration for the youth of her community. Janet Guthrie is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Rose Heyano

is a Hero. Rose is a Yup'ik from Dillingham, Alaska, and has been in health care services for over 20 years. She has been involved with subsistence activities all of her life and currently serves on the Alaska Native Elder Health Advisory Committee representing the Bristol Bay Health Corporation and the Bristol Bay Native Association.

Rose was honored nationally for her role in the building and funding of Marrulut Eniit (Yup'ik for Grandmother's House), a regional elder care facility in Dillingham. This 10-unit assisted living home was used as an example of how to plan, establish, and most importantly creatively fund an elder care facility. Her contribution to improving health care for Alaska Native elders and her efforts to preserve the Alaska Native culture will continue to benefit elders and inspire young people for decades to come. Rose Heyano is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Claire Hughes

is a Hero. Dr. Claire Ku'uleilani (my heavenly wreath) Hughes is a respected Native Hawaiian elder born on the Island of Hawai'i, she has dedicated her life to the health and well-being of Native Hawaiians. She has served as Chief of Nutrition for the Hawaii State Department of Health, authored journal articles and community-based newsletters on health issues confronting Native Hawaiians, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. In the mid-1980s, along with two Native Hawaiian physicians, she partnered in developing use of the traditional Native Hawaiian Diet (THD). The THD modifies numerous health problems associated with consuming a westernized diet of high cholesterol, high saturated fat, and low fiber. Since her retirement at the end of 2002, Dr. Hughes has volunteered in the local community and works with the American Cancer Society.

Throughout her life Dr. Hughes has sought knowledge and methods to help others enjoy good health. Her parents raised their children with an expectation of using their gifts, knowledge, and talents to lead purposeful and helpful lives. She has been the embodiment of this philosophy and it lives on through her children and grandchildren. Dr. Claire Hughes is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. Noreen Mokuau



Andrew Jimmie

is a Hero. He is chair of the Joint Alaska Native Elder Advisory Committee and chair of the ANTHC board of directors. An Athabascan from Minto, Alaska, he helped with the relocation of that village after the old village of Minto was flooded numerous times.

He is known as an Alaska Native statesman and a true diplomat. He has the ability to bring together diverse cultural groups who have opposing points of view and in the end helps them reach an acceptable consensus on the many issues of concern. This skill has brought him recognition for chairing large boards, committees and regional organizations.

Andrew Jimmie is a tireless advocate for his tribe and elders.

Andrew Jimmie is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Mary T. John

is a hero. She is a member of the Spirit Lake tribes and devotes her time to helping tribal elders in her community of Fargo/Moorhead. In November, 2007, she organized the first Native American Elders Council in the area. Mary schedules the meetings, mails out invitations to the elders (most of them do not have internet access or do not know how to use it); provides transportation , and healthy snacks. Mary listens to the elders' concerns, sees their needs, and works with them to find solutions. She has written grants to help pay for prescription drugs, transportation (bus tokens and payment of mileage), and assistance in emergency situations.

Mary has great respect for the elders. She sees them as a great resource for cultural beliefs and knowledge. Mary T. John is a hero.

Nominated by Doreen H. Eagle



Gladys Jung

is a Hero. She is no longer with us but we honor her memory and remember her love for her people, the Alaska Native. Jung taught public school in several locations in Southwest Alaska and spend many hours volunteering. She was active in the Bethel region anti-tobacco campaign, appearing on posters and speaking out against eqmik (a mixture of tree fungus ash and chewing tobacco that accelerates nicotine's effects) and was posthumously awarded the Alaska Federation of Native's Elder of the Year Award in 2008.

Gladys was a born storyteller whose advice was often tempered with humor. She spoke Yup'ik fluently and encouraged parents to speak the language with their children so it would never be lost. Her legacy lives on through all those whose lives she touched and through her children and grandchildren. As one of her grandchildren said, "In the end we all have some of grandma in us, whether it's her strength, her kindness, her humor or her generosity. And for that I am thankful." Gladys Jung is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Daniel Karmun

is a Hero. Mr. Karmun is an Inupiaq from Nome, Alaska. He has served as a commissioner on the Alaska Commission on Aging, and currently represents the Norton Sound Health Corporation on the Alaska Native Elder Health Advisory Committee. He has worked tirelessly to pass on Inupiaq cultural knowledge and values to his people young and old. His goal is to insure that cultural restoration has a firm foundation for future generations.

He is a renowned story teller whose stories not only entertain but impart cultural history and appropriate lessons of survival in the Arctic. He speaks the Inupiaq language fluently and is respected for his knowledge of the Inupiaq lifeways and culture. Despite the many challenges he has faced in his life his sense of humor has never faltered. His legacy will be an active Inupiaq culture stretching into the future. Daniel Karmun is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Beverly Karsten

is a Hero. She is devoted to helping improve the lives of elders on the White Earth Reservation and throughout the area. She has worked tirelessly to serve elders by providing opportunities for education, exercise, appropriate nutrition, and improved services. She is an incredibly hard worker and when she is put in charge you know things will be done well, with professionalism, and always with a smile and a helping hand.

Beverly coordinates health screenings, walks, and education sessions tailored specifically to tribal elders and makes sure that if someone has a need, that need is met. She has served on the Wisdom Steps board for many years and for the past several years has set up the annual State-wide Wisdom Steps Conference. Beverly is giving, compassionate, and humble, frequently goes above and beyond when she sees an elder in need. Her work is often behind the scenes and rarely recognized. Beverly Karsten is a Hero.

Nominated by Carol Fabre



Donna Kessinger

is a Hero. She feels a great responsibility toward the Tribal elders. She calls elders in the Salem area to check on them. If they need assistance she calls the Tribal office to help them find a solution to their problems. For the past eight years Donna has been hauling fish and apples to elders in the Salem, Portland, and Siletz area of Oregon. Donna's family along with many elders pick the apples; Donna goes to Mt. Hood to pick up fish from the hatchery; then Donna makes all the phone calls and delivers the apples and fish to the elders.

Donna remembers the old ways. She remembers Indian women helped each other can fruit, make jam and jelly, and helped each other with sewing projects. She continues this tradition because she wants to and she enjoys assisting others. Donna is a caring person. She brings not only apples and fish, she delivers joy. Donna Kessinger is a Hero.

Nominated by Shirley Walker



Susan LaBelle

is a Hero. She is Sugpiaq and Filipino from Chigachmuit Incorporated. Susan has been a social worker for over 30 years. and she helped to develop a Masters in Social Work degree at the University of Alaska Anchorage so that students would not have to leave Alaska to get their Masters degree. She has served on the Board of Trustees for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority for seven years, is a past President of the National Association for Social Workers in Alaska, served as director of Social Services for the Cook Inlet Tribal Council and is currently working for her regional health corporation, Chugachmuit, Inc.

In 2005 she was instrumental in getting a \$3,000,000 grant for Chugachmuit, Incorporated to institute a Sugpiaq language program. Preserving Alaska Native languages is one of the keys to keeping cultural knowledge and values alive and when good education is close at hand the old and the new can function together in harmony with the natural resources Alaska offers. Her legacy will be apparent in the people she has enriched and resources she has helped to preserve. Susan LaBelle is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Cynthia LaCounte

is a Hero. Cynthia has worked on behalf of tribal elders for the past 32 years. For the past four years she has served as the Training & Technical Assistance Manager under the KAI Title VI Training & Technical Assistance contract with the Administration on Aging. She also serves on the Steering Committee for the National Resource Center on Native American Aging, the ElderCare Locator American Indian Advisory Committee N4A, and the Aberdeen Area Tribal Chairman's Association Epidemiology Center Advisory Committee. Cynthia has also worked as a national consultant providing technical assistance, assessment and training to elder service programs across the nation

Cynthia is recognized nationally for her expertise in issues regarding elders ; this allows her to be an effective advocate for Native American elder issues on the tribal, local, state, and federal level. She places elders as a priority in her professional and personal life and has overcome barriers and adversity in doing so. The impact she has had on the elder community will be felt for many generations to come. Cynthia LaCounte is a Hero.

Nominated by Linda Wright



Anecia Lomack

is a Hero. She is Yup'ik from Manokotak, Alaska. She was the last child in her family and the only one of her brothers and sisters to be born in a hospital. After graduating from high school Anecia completed a summer course and began teaching Bilingual Education at the Manokotak School. In 1984 Lomack earned her teaching certificate and continued teaching until her retirement in July, 2008.

She currently works as an Instructional Aide at the Manokotak School, hiring elders to work with High School students on different projects. Spending time with elders and working with them has encouraged the students to be more serious. Their respect for all aspects of school has increased. They have learned to honor all people and community members and the interaction has provided knowledge to help the students make decisions about their future. Anecia says, "Students express themselves freely as they work on their projects and the elders are there to communicate with them. Working with their hands, minds, and bodies makes them better mind discoverers." Anecia Lomack has shared her knowledge of the Yup'ik language and culture along with her love of learning with generations of young people. Her legacy will live on in every life she has touched. Anecia Lomack is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Dr. Richard “Rick” Ludtke

is a Hero! He used his demographic, sociological, and gerontological expertise along with his experience working with rural populations to develop a Native elder social and health needs assessment that has assisted over 300 tribes, villages, and Hawaiian homelands. This project, in existence over the past 10 years, allows Native populations to identify their health and social status and compare their results to the U.S. general population and all Native populations that have participated. The data has been used by communities and tribal governments to address long-term care infrastructure needs through planning, funding application, and advocacy efforts. The needs assessment project is ongoing and has been used by over 35,711 Native elders.

Rick is a calm and wise decision maker, whose advice is based on logic, process, and information. He has been a strong advocate for Native American Elders testifying at legislative committees in Washington and presenting to the Congress of American Indians in 2005 and the Federal Interagency Taskforce Meeting on Older American Indians in 2006. He has mentored and assisted over 1,000 students and community members by facilitating awareness of issues and providing effective models of intervention to address identified problems. He has been attempting to retire from the National Resource Center on Native American Aging for over three years, but we continue to rely on his foresight for addressing the needs of Native elders. Rick Ludtke is a Hero.

Nominated by Kim Ruliffson and Russ McDonald



Dr. Ethel Lund

is a Hero. Dr. Lund has devoted her life to improving health care for Alaska Native people. Her focus has been the integration of cultural aspects of healing into health programs. Dr. Lund has said, "We have traditional healing. We have ways of treating illness. We have ways of treating social illness, and I wanted to bring those into play."

Even though retired she continues her work, currently serving on the Alaska Native Elder Health Advisory Committee representing the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium. Dr. Lund has received many awards over the years recognizing her leadership and selfless dedication to better health services for her people in Southeast Alaska. She continues to be a guiding light in the effort to combine the traditional knowledge of Alaska Native people with new ways from other parts of the world. She is an inspiration to all who know her. Dr. Ethel Lund is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Iver Malutin

is a Hero. An Aleut from Kodiak Island, Alaska, he is a founding director of the Afognak Island Corporation, one of the most successful village corporations in Alaska. He is very proud that Afognak will soon have a permanent dividend fund of \$17,000 for all of their village shareholders.

He started an Alaska Native foods program for elders on Kodiak Island and the in Kodiak villages. The program provides salmon, halibut, Kodiak Island deer, and ducks to both Alaska Native and non-Natives every spring. Through the Prince William Sound Citizens Advisory Council he addresses subsistence concerns and helps insure that environmentally sound practices are taken into account in seagoing transportation. Malutin is a commissioner on the Alaska Commission on Aging, the Elders Advocate for the Kodiak Area Native Association, and is currently working for the establishment of elder advocates in all of the regional organizations and villages in Alaska. His work for his village and his concern for elders all over Alaska will continue to benefit future generations. Iver Malutin is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles

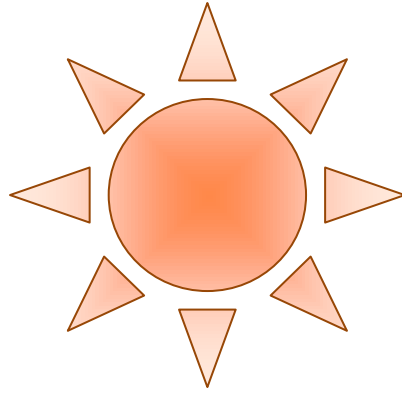


Jane Martin

is a Hero. She has been working for Chickaloon Native Village since 1999 in the Health and Social Services Department. Her contributions to assisting and lessening the isolation experienced by Elders in our community has been invaluable. Jane helps them find medical services, pay bills, get to stores and local farms to get food. She also operates a weekly Elders' Lunch program and works individually with Elders in our Community Greenhouse and Gardens.

Because of Jane's cultural background as an Alaskan Native, she understands the importance of treating our Elders with Dignity and respect. Jane knows the value of learning from our Elders by spending time with them. This interaction allows her to identify their problems and find ways to better serve them. She provides companionship while enriching the their lives and lives of the entire community. Jane Martin is a Hero.

Nominated by Lisa Wade

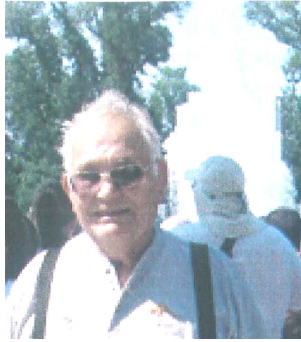


Judy Nieto

is a Hero. She is part of the Elders Services group at the Tule River Indian Health Center and the Tule River Yokut Community. Judy is a very caring person, anything she can do to help she will. She is well loved and respected at work as well as around the community. For example while elders were in convalescent homes Judy would go see them; even when there was no response by the patient, she would sit there and comfort them.

Thank you Judy for sharing your big heart and giving spirit with the whole community. Your caring has comforted and inspired. Judy Nieto is a Hero.

Nominated by Adrianna Gibson



Bill Rossig

is a Hero. Bill is a member of the Wiyot Tribe in California and a veteran of World War II. He has been a dedicated volunteer all of his life. He coached youth football and baseball for 45 years. He built homes and set up a children's playground. When he saw many elders needed help with heat in the winter he started his own Elder Wood Program. Bill collects scrap wood and distributes it to the elderly on three local reservations.

Bill served on the Wiyot Tribal Council for 12 years and he sits on two United Indian Health Services Boards. He has been a volunteer for the Blue Lake Rancheria Elder Nutrition Program for over 15 years, packaging at least 380 meals a week. Bill even showed up to work for the nutrition program when he was going through cancer treatments. Bill's dedication and giving spirit have enriched the lives of all those who know him. He is an inspiration and a role model. Bill Rossig is a Hero.

Nominated by Anita Huff



Mary Schaeffer

is a Hero. She is Inupiaq from Kotzebue and represents the Maniilaq Association located in Kotzebue. She has been working to address the problem of elder mistreatment in her region as well as being a strong advocate for better health services in the Northwest Alaska Native Association.

She and her husband, retired four star General John Schaeffer, have travelled throughout the world to attend indigenous conferences that address the needs of First Nations people. Their trip to New Zealand to meet with the Moari impressed upon them the idea of “language nests” and the importance of cultural preservation. She is a speaker of the Inupiaq language and an advocate of the use of traditional healing in conjunction with modern medicine. Mary Schaeffer is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles

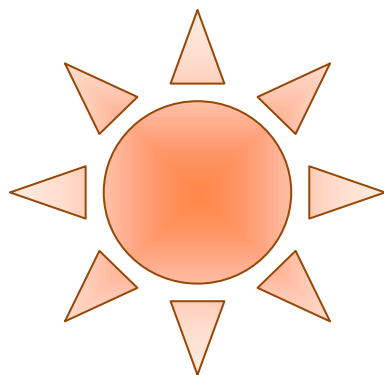


James Sipary

is a Hero. He is Yup'ik originally from Nightmute, Alaska. who believes that the solutions to many present day problems lie within the cultural knowledge of our elders. He is a member of the Alaska Native Elder Health Advisory Committee, an Information and Education Technician with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and is still a subsistence fisherman and hunter.

His work in educating others in the management and conservation of the plants, habitat and environment of our fish and game has contributed to maintaining the Yup'ik way of life, their culture, and identity. He advocates for prevention of suicide, injuries caused by snow machine and four wheelers, and drug abuse. He encourages elders to look to the past to gain knowledge of how their ancestors helped to keep order and resolve social issues. James Sipary is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Dr. Kenneth Toovak

is a Hero. An Inupiaq from Barrow, Alaska, Kenny Toovak has been instrumental in ensuring the success of countless scientific research projects and expeditions. His extensive knowledge of the characteristics of the tundra, ocean and sea ice, and their potential impacts on projects as well as on the lives of those conducting the projects was used by research teams to make adjustments to protect the integrity of their experiments and the safety of their operations. Over the years Toovak became known for his ability to make a quick assessment of a problem and find a creative solution.

He is fluent in the Inupiaq language and has worked throughout his life to transmit Inupiaq cultural knowledge and values to Alaska Natives. He is still active with the Barrow Senior and Youth in his ongoing work to rehabilitate troubled young people and reduce elder mistreatment. His legacy of caring and finding workable solutions to problems will live on through all the people he has touched in his life. Dr. Kenneth “Utuayuk” Toovak is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



Emma Widmarck

is a hero. Emma was a respected member of the Tlingit tribe and was "Promoted to Glory" July 7, 2008. She dedicated her life to the promotion of higher education and the well being of Alaska Native people throughout the state of Alaska.

Emma served as a delegate for the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Grand Camp President of Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) and was a lifetime member of the ANS Camp 2 of Juneau. She was very active in the T&H Elders Caregivers Council, "Litseemi K u.oo" (Strong People) Fitness group and the "Journey to Wellness" annual event. She conducted "Identifying Our Needs" surveys door to door in 2007 and devoted her last year advocating for the betterment of the Elderly Services Program to all who would listen.

Only an angel could find strength to have carried so many friends; she must have had wings. Gunal cheesh (thank-you) we were inspired, encouraged and loved by this dear lady for many years. Emma G. Widmark is a hero.

Nominated by Andrea Ebona-Michel



Lotha Wolf

is a Hero. She is an Athabascan Indian woman from Mentasta Lake near the Canadian border in Alaska. She has been a member of the Mentasta Traditional Council for 24 years working for better health care services, elder programs, and subsistence issues. Over the years she has also worked with the Indian Child Welfare Program in the Mentasta Tribal Council and served on the board of the Mentasta Lake Katie John School. Currently she also serves on the Alaska Native Elder Health Advisory Committee representing the Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium.

In addition to Lotha's service to Alaska Natives she has been a foster parent and has been raising her grandchildren for the past 27 years. Her community service, her commitment to family, and her tribe have earned her the respect of all who know her. Her dedication and giving spirit will continue to bless and inspire future generations. Lotha Wolf is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles



LaVerne Wyaco

is a hero. She has been working for the Navajo National Area Agency on Aging for 18 years. LaVerne travels throughout the Navajo nation extensively and has gotten to know many of the elders and many know her as just "Laverne".

Laverne is constantly seeking sources of funding. She does whatever is necessary to make sure the needs of elders are met. Through her efforts the Navajo elderly 60 years and older have been able to obtain free eyeglasses since 1992. Other projects such as dentures, hearing aids and wheelchairs were added later. Today approximately 8,500 glasses have been dispensed to elders. She attends scheduled public hearings throughout the reservation and gathers information on what is critical to the elders. She visits senior centers when she can and encourages her staff to do more with less. LaVerne is a trustworthy professional who works diligently every day to meet the needs of the elders.

LaVerne is the best at what she does. Most of her life has been spent on the reservation and contributing to the community in her position as director of the program that serves elders. Laverne Wyaco is a hero.

Nominated by Julie Smith



Mike Zacharof

is a Hero. He is Aleut and serves as Sgt. at Arms on the Board of the Aleutian Pribilof Island Association (APIA). He also functions as the Elder Advocate on the Elder Task Force for APIA, serves on the Audit and Finance Committee as well as the Executive Committee. He has spent his life serving the Aleut community and representing them on various statewide organizations.

He has been of inestimable value in helping improve health care for Alaska Natives across the state. He has also been active in keeping the cultural values and traditional knowledge of the Aleut alive. He worked to preserve the only two remaining Aleut seagoing boats in St. Paul. The boats were built in the traditional manner of hand tying all of the individual parts of the main boat structure. His influence will be felt throughout his community for many decades to come. Mike Zacharof is a Hero.

Nominated by Dr. George P. Charles

L I S T E N

Listen Listen Listen
The ice sings to the clear, cold sky.
Water bubbles over smooth rocks.
Soft wind moves prairie grass.
Listen, listen, it speaks to you.

Listen Listen Listen
Sunrise breaks open colors of the sky.
Waves break on black volcanic rock.
An eagle soars upward, upward.
Listen, listen, it speaks to you.

Listen Listen Listen
Open your heart; free your spirit.
You are one with the universe.
No color, no form, only essence.
Listen, listen, it speaks to you.

Listen Listen Listen
The Hero brings wisdom and strength.
The hero and the essence are one.
All can partake; all can contribute.
Listen, listen, it speaks to you.

Ann Miller
