

First Alaskans Institute

News Release

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ANNOUNCING THE 2015 AWARDEES OF THE HOWARD ROCK & TED STEVENS SMOKEHOUSE GALA

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide Alaska Native non-profit organization, is proud to announce the awardees of the fourth annual Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala, to be held at 7 p.m., November 21st at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage. The Gala celebrates and recognizes the contributions of Alaska Native peoples and our friends in advancing our collective wellbeing. It is named in honor of Howard Rock (Iñupiaq) and Senator Ted Stevens as lifetime champions of Alaska Native peoples.

The Smokehouse Gala awards “remember those who have helped us, show our young people that we believe in them, and share the pride in our cultures,” said Willie “Iggiagruk” Hensley (Iñupiaq), FAI Board Chair. It is from a place of deep respect and gratitude on behalf of the First Alaskans Institute Board of Trustees and Staff, we are honored to award the following:

First Alaskans Institute Young Native Leader Awardee: Samuel Johns

This person or organization has shown through dedication that they are working to help Native peoples and our community with significant and profound purpose, and is specifically given to a young leader 40 years old and younger.

Samuel Johns (AK REBEL) is a community activist, motivational speaker and hip hop artist. Using hip hop as a tool to create awareness for some of the issues that Alaskans face, he premiered his music video about ending Domestic Violence at the 2014 Qu yana Nights at the AFN Annual Convention. Since January, he has traveled to over a dozen communities around Alaska to speak to youth about living a drug and alcohol free lifestyle. On June



10th, he created a Facebook Group to help reconnect homeless Alaskans to their families. His goal is to inspire

youth to make a difference in their community. Growing up in Copper Center surrounded by drugs and alcohol and struggling with these issues, he changed his life and now is a sober and dedicated father, husband, and community organizer. As a musician, he blends



Athabascan culture with modern hip hop to inspire kids to preserve their connection to who they are and help them understand how cool and amazing our cultures are. Samuel often goes to Beans Café to share songs and dances with the brothers and sisters during lunch. For him and many others, it's not just music - it's healing.

Friends of First Alaskans Ted Stevens Awardees:

William "Bill" Oberly and Governor William "Bill" Sheffield

This award is given to a person(s) or organization that has shown through their support of Native issues and partnership with our common cause that they are friends of the Alaska Native community.

WILLIAM "BILL" OBERLY



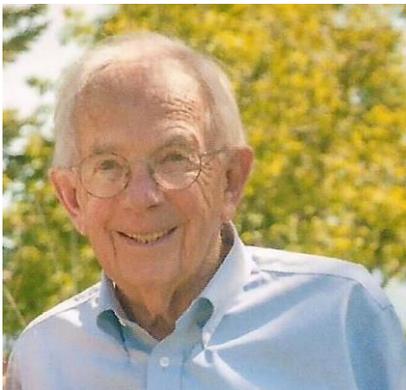
William "Bill" Oberly, an attorney in Anchorage, epitomizes the spirit of this award. As a law firm owner and Executive Director of the [Alaska Innocence Project](#), Bill took on the "Fairbanks Four" case in 2008 after a flood of requests for assistance and has worked tirelessly on the case on a 'pro-bono' basis since. The Fairbanks Four case is about the exoneration of Eugene Vent, Keven Pease, George Frese, and Marvin Roberts - four young Native men who were wrongfully convicted in 1997 of a brutal murder in Fairbanks.

The case is astoundingly complex and Bill Oberly's steadfast dedication, dogged legal work, and leadership over the past 7 years in

pursuit of justice is nothing short of a lesson in determination – through his tireless efforts and the upswell of community support, the cries for justice for these young men has continued to grow, resulting in the most recent evidentiary hearing which had Alaskans glued to the courthouse and social networks, seeking full exoneration of these men.



GOVERNOR WILLIAM "BILL" SHEFFIELD



Governor Bill Sheffield has been a leader in business, government, and public policy for most of the sixty-three years he has lived in Alaska. He served as governor from 1982 to 1986, following a business career in which he built a company that became one of the largest private employers in Alaska and the Yukon Territory. Since that time, he has served on the board of directors for several private and non-profit organizations, acted as an economic development consultant specializing in natural resource development, served as president of the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce and the Alaska Visitors Association, and also as Director of the Port of Anchorage. While he is currently enjoying his fourth attempt at retirement, he continues to serve as a trustee of Alaska Pacific University and a charter member of Commonwealth North, and was inducted into the Alaska Business Hall of Fame in 2003.

As a candidate for Governor in 1982, Sheffield's campaign theme was "bringing the state together," a reference to a pair of divisive ballot initiatives up for a vote that same year. His message of inclusion and focus on problem solving helped him win the governorship in a landslide vote. As the fifth Governor of Alaska, his term included unforeseen challenges including a dramatic drop in the price of oil and an unsustainable state budget. Under his leadership, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council created the Community Development Quotas (CDQ) - leading the way for 7 regions and 65 villages within the state to have more decision-making ability supported by these entities - he oversaw the purchase of the Alaska Railroad, and was instrumental in helping the people of the Northwest Arctic pursue their interests in developing the Red Dog mining operation, which has had substantial economic impact for the people of the region.

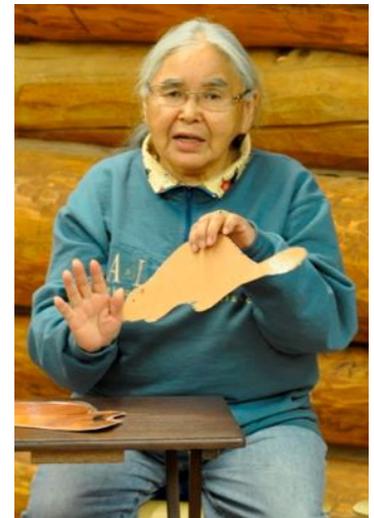


Alaska Native Leader Howard Rock Awardee: Eliza Jones

This person or organization has shown through their quality of character and effort to be a leader of distinct caliber because they put their community and people before themselves.



Eliza Jones is Tl'eyegge Hut'aane (Koyukon Athabascan) and a speaker of Denaakk'e the Central dialect of the Koyukon language. Her Denaakk'e name is Neelteloyeenee'no, which means "mixed talent" or "having more than one project going at the same time." Born in Cut-Off and raised in Huslia, she currently resides in Koyukuk with her husband Benedict Jones.



Eliza utilized her active listening skills and strong relationships with her Elders to become a skilled translator between Denaakk'e and English. When she discovered bound manuscripts of Jesuit missionary Father Jetté based upon his ministry in

Nulato in the early 1900's, she dedicated over 25 years to edit and refine the collection into a usable Koyukon Athabascan Dictionary, which was later released in 2000 through the Alaska Native Language Center at UAF. Much more than a dictionary, the exhaustive 1,100 page resource is a comprehensive cultural encyclopedia and chronicle for the rich cultural, spiritual and knowledge source of the natural world surrounding Koyukon people, receiving the Alaska Native Literary Arts award in 2001.

A 1990 UAF Honorary Doctor of Letters, Eliza has advised various institutions as an expert knowledge source, and has inspired others to continue their language and cultural practices, especially her family members and Native youth.

**First Alaskans Institute expresses our congratulations and appreciation to each of these inspiring leaders!
We thank their families and communities for supporting them in all
that they have done for our Native peoples and Alaska.**

Proceeds from the Gala benefit First Alaskans Institute, a statewide Native nonprofit whose vision is ‘Progress for the *next* 10,000 years...’ and that serves as a catalyst for conversation, convener of minds and cross-sector collaborator on issues impacting Alaska Native peoples and our communities. Our mission is: True to identity, heritage, and values, Alaska Natives are informed and engaged in leading the decisions that shape the future.

Sponsorship, volunteer, and other opportunities to support the Gala and FAI are still available. Learn about our work at firstalaskans.org. For more information about the Gala, visit thesmokehousegala.org.

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