

First Alaskans Institute

News Release

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For Immediate Release
November 18, 2020

ANNOUNCING SPECIAL TRHT TRIBUTE DURING THE 2020 HOWARD ROCK & TED STEVENS SMOKEHOUSE GALA

(Dgheyey Kaq', Dena'inaq ełnen'aq' qilan) – This has been a year of living virtually for most of us, a shift that has brought us both closer together and further apart at the same time. While we miss seeing each other in person, the amplification of Native presence across all mediums has kept us connected and visible – globally, nationally, and here at home in Alaska. To uplift the incredible efforts of media makers that have worked hard to ensure the world knows and values Indigenous peoples during these challenging times and beyond, the First Alaskans Institute Board and Staff would like to express their gratitude to the following groups: **Portugal. The Man**, **Indian Country Today (led by Mark Trahant, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes)** and **Molly of Denali** including the many incredible Alaska Native peoples who make the show what it is.

As we spend unprecedented time on our screens, these media makers have used their platforms, voices, and stories to ensure our Native peoples' humanity is centered, our Native leadership and indigeneity is recognized, and attention is brought to our peoples, homelands, and issues. The time has long since come to reckon with and right past wrongs that inhibit our potential, grow understanding of our true histories, and advance an equitable future for all. These three global influencers are drawing critical light to issues of racial equity, social justice, and inter-generational healing, and they do it by following the lead of Native peoples; we are proud to call them our relatives.

This special tribute is grounded in our Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) endeavor to acknowledge the spaces they make for our truths to be told, the narratives they are helping to change, and the ways they both honor the brilliance of Indigenous peoples across the world and catalyze understanding of the Indigenous lands upon which this country is in solidarity, every single day. They take great care to share loving and true representations of our peoples and ways of life.



Eric Howk, Zach Carothers and John Baldwin Gourley performing in Anchorage. Photo by FAI

Portugal. The Man is an American rock band from Wasilla, currently based in Portland, OR. The group consists of John Baldwin Gourley, Zach Carothers, Kyle O'Quin, Jason Sechrist, Eric Howk and Zoe Manville. Gourley and Carothers met and began playing music together in 2001 at Wasilla High School. They speak out against systemic racism, welcome local Indigenous peoples to open all of their shows, and partner with Indigenous peoples to amplify our voices and issues critical to our communities. When they won their Grammy, Zach Carothers shared: "We grew up in a small town in Alaska. This is crazy for us. Our heroes are dog mushers and stuff like that.... We'd like to rep this for all the kids in the villages — Shishmaref, Barrow, Bethel. All the Indigenous people in Alaska and around the world. You're beautiful and your cultures are beautiful. Thank you for inspiring us." In 2019, First Alaskans recognized them during the annual FAI Elders & Youth Conference for their allyship and advocacy. While there, they volunteered to DJ the teen dance, and helped mentor a young leader who was interested in DJing during the event. They are supported in this work by Amy *Paniliaq* Sparck (Cup'ik), Dennis Davis (Iñupiaq), Don Rearden, and Bob Petersen (Yup'ik) along with many others.



Indian Country Today (ICT) is a daily digital news platform led by **Mark Trahant (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes)** that covers the Indigenous world, including American Indians, Alaska Natives and First Nations peoples. In a society that has for too long ignored or maltreated Indigenous peoples' stories, Mark and ICT's work to raise awareness about the challenges and opportunities facing our peoples today and share the brilliance of our cultures, traditions and knowledge systems has helped to shift the narratives about us through centering our own voices and worldviews. Aptly, both the vision of ICT and Mark's own journalism were inspired by Howard Rock and his transformative advocacy to uplift our voices. Mark has spoken at the Smokehouse Gala to share this story and has always participated in and supported First Alaskans' work, recognizing that our collective aspirations are aligned. He has spoken as a catalyzer during dialogues helping to drive home the importance of Native presence in the media and understanding the data of our lives, and has also presented at our annual FAI Elders & Youth Conference. With their ever-growing platform, Mark and his team of Alaska-based journalists and photographers work hard to ensure that stories about Alaska are always included in ICT. Their recent coverage of elections on behalf of Indian Country was particularly insightful as it helped connect and highlight the efforts of local, state, and national Native candidates.

Molly of Denali is an animated children's television series created and produced by Atomic Cartoons and WGBH Kids for PBS Kids and CBC Television that premiered in July 2019. The series is the first nationally distributed children's show to feature an Alaska Native as the lead character, in no small part due to the inclusion of Alaska Native culture bearers, storytellers, advisory members, and producers that inform the show's direction and authenticity. This show has made an incredible positive impact around the nation showing vibrant Alaska Native cultures in a beautiful and accurate way. The show tackles challenging issues, such as the impact of boarding schools and inter-generational healing, cultural and language revitalization, and highlights the adventurous spirit and leadership of our young people living in a diverse and beautiful Alaska. The editor of our First Alaskans Magazine is one of the show's writers, Vera T'set Kwei Starbard (Tlingit/Dena'ina). Princess *Daazhrai* Johnson (Gwich'in/Koyukon), the show's Creative Producer, along with many other beautiful Native peoples, have worked hard to ensure that the production, storylines, characters and evolution of the show are all accurate and true to our peoples' experiences and ways of life. With Molly, our children and families will always see their beautiful selves and communities lovingly reflected back to them regularly through national television on prime time – the first time in history this has been the case, and with the incredible popularity of this show, it certainly won't be the last.



Molly of Denali. Photo by PBS.

Please join the First Alaskans Institute Board of Trustees and Staff in honoring these incredible advocates and their families for all they've done and continue to do to advance awareness, healing and justice for Native peoples! Their tremendous work benefits us all, quyanaasinaq!

For more information about the Smokehouse Gala, visit

<https://app.mobilecause.com/e/p5z1VA?vid=dsn9z>.

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About First Alaskans Institute (FAI): *At FAI we know we are responsible for carrying more than 10,000 years of ancestral knowledge into the future with rigor, humor, resilience, vigilance, and love.*

To learn more, please visit our website at firstalaskans.org, contact us at 907-677-1700 or via email info@firstalaskans.org.