

# First Alaskans Institute

## News Release

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## ANNOUNCING 2020 SMOKEHOUSE GALA AWARDEES

Anchorage, Alaska – First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide Alaska Native nonprofit, is proud to announce the awardees of our ninth annual Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala, to be held virtually on November 21. Named in recognition of Howard Rock (Iñupiaq) and the late Senator Ted Stevens, the Smokehouse Gala celebrates the significant contributions of Alaska Native peoples and our friends in advancing our collective wellbeing, and honors the centrifugal force being good relatives to one another plays in making Alaska a special place. We invite you to join us for our highly anticipated annual event each Native Heritage Month, designed to uplift and honor our peoples, cultures, communities and friends, while raising critical funds to benefit the work of First Alaskans Institute year-round.

With deep respect and gratitude, the FAI Board of Trustees and staff are honored to lift up the great work of the following people and their families:

### **Alaska Native Leader Howard Rock Award *Akighqukaaghaq Melanie Bahnke (St. Lawrence Island Yupik)***

Akighqukaaghaq's parents are Sterling and Arnold Gologergen and George Edwards. She is a member of the Native Village of Savoonga and speaks St. Lawrence Island Yupik as her first language. She is married to Kevin Bahnke, and together they have three incredible children, Joshua, Alicyn, and Ivy. She and her family enjoy camping, fishing and hunting together.

Serving as the President of Kawerak, the regional tribal consortia in the Bering Strait region of Alaska, Akighqukaaghaq works every day with amazing colleagues that support rural Alaska as a positive, nourishing environment where our children, families and communities thrive rooted in the strength of our cultures. She seeks to continue their collective work to improve the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions for Alaska Native peoples. She believes we've come a long way because we stand on the shoulders of our Ancestors, and we need to reach out and lift up the next generation to stand on our shoulders as well.



*Melanie Akighqukaaghaq Bahnke*

Akighqukaaghaq is called upon often by our community to advocate on behalf of Arctic and Alaska Native issues across the state, nation, and internationally as well. She always does it with a fierce love and strong voice for our peoples. Her leadership and advocacy helped to secure and solidify the first in the nation Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact between Alaska Native Tribes, Tribal organizations, and the State of Alaska. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Rural Development from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and a Bachelor of Education degree in Elementary Education from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

**First Alaskans Institute Young Native Leader Award  
Dr. X'unei Lance Twitchell (Tlingit, Haida, Yup'ik)**



*Lance X'unei Twitchell and his children*

Dr. Lance Twitchell carries the Tlingit names X'unei, Du Aaní Kawdinook, and Yoo Kaawajígi Yéil, and the Haida name K'eijáakw. He lives in Juneau with his wife Mariah and their three beautiful bilingual children, and is from the Tlingit, Haida, and Yup'ik Native nations. He speaks and studies the Tlingit language, advocates for indigenous language revitalization, and is an Assistant Professor of Alaska Native Languages at the University of Alaska Southeast, as well as a multimedia Northwest Coast Artist and musician.

In addition to his impressive scholarly contributions to include Tlingit knowledge and language within the Academy, X'unei is also an active language healer and warrior, and a staunch advocate for the decolonization of law and policy. His advocacy was instrumental in ensuring the State of Alaska officially recognized Alaska Native languages, and declared a state of linguistic emergency to call attention to the suppression of our languages and reconciliation efforts that must be put in place.

X'unei earned his Bachelor of Arts in English and Minor in American Indian Studies from University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from University of Alaska Fairbanks and most recently, a Ph.D. in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization through Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawaii Hilo.

**Friends of First Alaskans Ted Stevens Award  
Dr. E.J. R. David**

Dr. E.J.R. David was born in the Philippines to Kapampangan and Tagalog parents, and grew up in Pasay, Las Piñas, and Utqiagvik (previously known as Barrow). He is married to Margaret Olin David (Koyukon), and together they have four children - Malakas (Strong), Kalayaan (Freedom), Kaluguran (Love), and Tala (Star).

As a foremost expert and prolific author in the realm of internalized oppression and structural racism, EJ's work has greatly impacted and strengthened the work of racial equity and social justice in Alaska. He consistently uses his expansive global and local platforms to call for immigrant and Indigenous solidarity. Few people know that it was through EJ's efforts - including drafting and gathering support – that both the Municipality of Anchorage and the State of Alaska pushed forward official recognition of Indigenous Peoples'



*E.J.R. David and his family  
Photo courtesy: NextDayBetter*

Day. He actively advocates with and for Indigenous peoples, and we are a stronger community for his tireless and deeply personal advocacy.

EJ obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), and Master of Arts and Ph.D. in Clinical-Community Psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is a Professor of Psychology at UAA, and his primary duties include being with the PhD Program in Clinical-Community Psychology that has a Rural, Cultural and Indigenous Emphasis.

**FAI is proud to congratulate each of these inspiring leaders! We thank their families and communities for supporting them in all they have done for our Native peoples throughout Alaska and beyond. Our world is brighter and stronger for their beautiful contributions.**

For more information about First Alaskans Institute, please visit

<https://firstalaskans.org>

For Sponsorship opportunities for the Smokehouse Gala, please contact

[development@firstalaskans.org](mailto:development@firstalaskans.org)

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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 [www.firstalaskans.org](http://www.firstalaskans.org), contact us at 907-677-1700 or email [info@firstalaskans.org](mailto:info@firstalaskans.org).*