ANNOUNCING 2022 Awardees of the FAI Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala

Dgheyey Kaq’; Dena’inaq elnen’aq’ qilan (Anchorage, Alaska; lands of the Dena’ina) – First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide Alaska Native advocacy nonprofit, is proud to announce our 11th Annual Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala Awardees. The Gala will be held in-person in Dgheyey Kaq’ (Anchorage) at the Dena’ina Center on Saturday, November 19th. Named in recognition of late Howard Rock (Iñupiaq) and Senator Ted Stevens, the Smokehouse Gala celebrates significant contributions of Alaska Native peoples and our friends in advancing our collective wellbeing, and the essential role of being good relatives to keep Alaska strong. With deep respect and gratitude, the FAI Trustees and Staff are honored to uplift and celebrate our peoples, cultures, communities, friends and families.

Howard Rock Alaska Native Leader Award:
Dr. Aveogan Oliver Leavitt (Iñupiaq)
This person 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. Aveogan has served in many leadership positions across the state, including as treasurer of the Arctic Slope Native Association for 24 years starting in 1970. He served as a board member for the Alaska Federation of Natives from 1971 to 1999, including co-chairmanship from 1985 to 1986. He was elected as the first president of the North Slope Borough Assembly and held that position for four years and then continued to serve on the Assembly for more than 20 years. Aveogan was elected to the ASRC board of directors upon the corporation’s inception, serving as treasurer from 1972 to 1983 and later as chairman. During his decades-long tenure in North Slope leadership, he was a member of Alaska’s Local Boundary and the U.S. Arctic Research Commissions. He is a founding Trustee of First Alaskans Institute and we are so proud to lift him up with this award. Oliver is known for his commitment to the community as a whaling boat builder and whaling captain. He is married to Annie Hopson Leavitt, and together they have three children and three grandchildren where they make their home in Utqiagvik.

First Alaskans Institute Young Native Leader Award:
Vera Starbard, T’set Kwei (Lingít/Dena’ina)
This young leader has shown through dedication they are working to help Native peoples and our community with significant and profound purpose.
Vera is a writer and editor. She was playwright-in-residence at Perseverance Theatre through the Andrew W. Mellon National Playwright Residency Program and writer for the PBS Kids children’s program “Molly of Denali,” which won a Peabody Award in 2020. She is currently the editor of First Alaskans Magazine and staff writer for the ABC network show “Alaska Daily.” She has won numerous writing and editing awards, including the Rasmuson Foundation Individual Artist Award and Alaska Literary Award. Vera currently serves on the KTOO Board of Directors, HowlRound Theatre Commons Advisory Council, and the Kachemak Bay Writer’s Conference Board. Her full-length play “Our Voices Will Be Heard” premiered at Perseverance Theatre in 2016, the first Alaska Native play to do so. It was then published in the textbook “Contemporary Plays by Women of Color” in 2017 and turned into a one-hour radio adaptation that aired nationwide in 2018. Vera currently lives with her husband Joe Bedard (Iñupiaq/Yup’ik/Cree) on Yaa Andagan Yé, colonially known as Douglas Island.
Friends of First Alaskans Ted Stevens Award:
Dr. Rick Knecht

Dr. Rick Knecht has been doing archaeology and cultural preservation projects in partnership with Alaska Native communities for 40 years; on Kodiak Island, the Aleutians and within the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. For the past 14 years he has co-directed the Nunalleq Archaeological Project with Warren Jones of Qanirtuuq, Inc. in Quinhagak. He was founding director of three Alaskan institutions that hold locally-recovered artifacts and celebrate Native cultures: the Alutiiq Museum on Kodiak, the Museum of the Aleutians in Unalaska and the Nunalleq Museum in Quinhagak. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland and works every summer in Alaska.

Special Tribute:
Congressman Don Young

The FAI Board of Trustees would like to express their gratitude to late Congressman Don Young and his family for his great contributions to the Native community by leading and supporting key legislation including educational and transportation infrastructure throughout the state, especially in remote and rural Alaska. He led and represented Alaska and the U.S. on numerous committees in his career that promoted the economy, healthcare, social issues, national security and more. As the longest serving member of Alaska’s congressional delegation, he leaves a legacy of advocating for Alaskans throughout his career that promoted the economy, healthcare, social issues, national security and more. He was a friend to many and his commitment and love to Alaska for over 45 years will be seen for years to come.

*This special tribute is grounded in one of our guiding principles, “By stewarding strong relationships across the state and sharing our knowledge, Alaska will become universally recognized and valued as a Native place.”*  
Congressman Young held deep love for Alaska and built important relationships to help strengthen Alaska for all.

FAI is proud to congratulate each of these inspiring leaders! Their brilliant minds paired with a deep love and unwavering voice for our Alaska Native peoples allows them to make tremendous contributions to our communities statewide. The diversity in the way they do this, across sector, region, and generations, is a testament to their impact and the critical role they and all other Alaskans can play in lifting up and celebrating the Native peoples of this incredible place. Tsíná’ęę to the Awardee’s families and communities for supporting them in all they’ve done for our Native peoples and all of Alaska. They join an incredible list of past awardees, listed below.

To buy a ticket, table, or sponsor the Smokehouse Gala, please [visit our website](#). Please call (907) 677-1700 or email [info@firstalaskans.org](mailto:info@firstalaskans.org) with any questions.

Past awardees and tributes:
**Howard Rock Alaska Native Leader**
Slath Jaa Klaa La Kootí Marlene Johnson (Lingít) – 2012
Mary Jane Evans Fate (Athabascan) – 2013
Dr. Kangrilinguq Paul & Anguyaluk Martina John (Yup’ik) – 2014
Neelteloyeneelno Eliza Jones (Koyukon) – 2015
At First Alaskans Institute, 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 www.firstalaskans.org, or contact us at info@firstalaskans.org.