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The contributions of Dr. William J. Benham, Jr., to Indian education programs in the United States were cited in a ceremony in Washington, D.C. on March 23.

Benham, a Creek Indian from Holdenville, Oklahoma, is the director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Indian Education Resources Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs Raymond V. Butler presented the Department of Interiors Meritorious Service Award to Benham, who was in Washington to testify at house appropriations hearings on the BIA's 1978 budget request. The presentation was made, with the approval of Subcommittee Chairman Sidney Yates, during a break in the hearings.

The citation described Benham as an innovator and a pioneer in the development of effective education programs for Indians. It noted that during Benham’s term as director of schools on the Navajo reservation, special efforts were made to adapt the education programs to Navajo people. These included the development of Navajo social studies, a Navajo program for teaching English as a second language and the establishment of parent advisory school boards at BIA schools.

Benham's achievements, as director of the resource center, include the nurturing of a program, adopted as a 1976 Presidential objective, to further Indian self-determination in the operation of schools.

Benham is a 1950 graduate of East Central Oklahoma University, which gave him in 1975 a Distinguished Alumnus Award. He earned his master's and Doctor's degrees from the University of Oklahoma.

Benham began his education career with BIA as a teacher at the Leupp boarding school on the Navajo reservation.