Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: May 4, 2006
Print PDF

WASHINGTON – Today at the 63rd Departmental Honor Awards Convocation held in the Sydney R. Yates Auditorium at the U.S. Department of the Interior, it was a time for the Department to honor its own – those who have served with sudden seconds of valor and long years of excellence. At the ceremony a private citizen and three Bureau of Indian Affairs employees were among the many to be awarded for their bravery, outstanding contributions and dedicated service to the Department. Edward D. Marsette of Auburn, WA, a private citizen was awarded the Citizen's Award for Bravery he was the only person to receive that honor from the Department this year. Mr. Wayne Nordwall, Phoenix, AZ was given the Distinguished Service Award. Mr. Wayne Sumatzkuku, Phoenix, AZ received the Meritorious Service Award, and Pierre Cantou, Phoenix, AZ was awarded the Meritorious Service Award.

"Each of our employees honored today distinguished themselves with either an act of bravery or a long rewarding career that made a difference in peoples lives," Associate Deputy Secretary James E. Cason said. "They exemplify the type of employees we have working at the BIA and the individuals that live in reservation communities across the country."

Accompanied by family and the Tribal Chairman of the Muckleshoot Tribe, Mr. Edward D. Marsette of Auburn, WA was awarded the Citizen's Award for Bravery, which is awarded to private citizens for heroic acts or unusual bravery in the face of danger. Recipients have risked their lives to save the life of a Departmental employee or the life of any other person while on property owned by or entrusted to the Department of the Interior.

On Wednesday, March 15, 2006, at 1:00 a.m., a vehicle occupied by six Muckleshoot Tribal members traveling on the Auburn/Enumclaw Highway on the Muckleshoot Reservation flipped, crashed into a utility pole, and caught fire. Mr. Marsette, a Chippewa Cree from the Rocky Boy Reservation in Montana, awoke when he heard the crash. Mr. Marsette ran from his home to the top of an embankment where he could see an overturned automobile, in flames. Without regard for his personal safety, Mr. Marsette plunged fifteen feet down a steep embankment toward the highway to help the victims. Mr. Marsette repeatedly reached into the burning vehicle to assist the remaining occupants, receiving burns on his hands, legs, and forearms. Mr. Marsette was able to pull three of the five passengers trapped in the vehicle to safety; unfortunately two occupants of the vehicle did not survive. Mr. Marsette remained with the victims until law enforcement and emergency medical personnel arrive before seeking treatment for his own injuries.

Mr. Wayne Nordwall, the former Western Regional Director, a member of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians was awarded the Distinguished Service Award for his outstanding contributions, commitment, and dedicated service to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior. Mr. Nordwall began his Federal career in 1977 with his appointment to the Rights Protection Office in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1981, he transferred to the Office of the Solicitor, Division of Indian Affairs and worked with Departmental representatives, Indian leaders and members of Congress to fashion a legislative solution that led to the passage of the Indian Land Consolidation Act of 1983. In November 1997, he was appointed to the Senior Executive Service and accepted the most challenging role of his career as the Regional Director for the Western Region of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in

Phoenix, AZ. Mr. Nordwall oversaw the jurisdiction of 13 million acres for tribal and individually owned land in Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and Southern California. He took an active role in working on trust reform initiatives for the Bureau, including the American Indian Probate Reform Act.

Mr. Wayne Sumatzkuku, a Realty Specialist, Office of Realty Services, Western Regional Office in Phoenix AZ, a member of the Hopi Tribe received the Meritorious Service Award for his dedicated career to the administration of the United States' core trust responsibilities to Indian tribes and individuals, primarily with land titles and conveyances. Early in his career he served as the Bureau's top archivist and title research specialist in the Office of Real Estate Services. Since 1990, Mr. Sumatzkuku has been at the Western Regional Office in Phoenix, AZ where he has been solely responsible for implementing the land components of some of the largest settlements enacted by Congress, including a complex claims settlement act involving two Nevada tribes, land claims settlement acts for the Hopi and San Lucy Tribes, and various statues enacted to resolve litigation between tribes and states, local communities, and third parties.

Mr. Pierre Cantou is a Para Legal Specialist with the Office of Realty Services, Western Regional Office in Pheonix, AZ. He received the Meritorious Service Award for 32 years at the Western Region, where he has worked on regional rights protection and real estate programs providing key documents and analysis in support of various litigation and legislation. Mr. Cantou has been recognized as a leading expert on all matters relating to surveys, land and water rights claims. With his institutional knowledge he has proved invaluable in successful, decades long efforts to resolve land and boundary disputes involving the Hopi, Hualapai, San Carlos, Colorado River, Chemehuevi, Quechan, Western Shoshone, and Unitah and Ouray Tribes. He has recently headed up the Regional Office's response to data calls and records-related trust reform initiatives arising form the Cobell litigation. Note to editors: A photo of the Department Honor Award Recipients may be viewed via the Interior Department website at www.doi.gov.

--DOI--