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For Immediate Release: September 20, 1983
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Interior Secretary James Watt cited the Cherokee Historical Association of North Carolina for service to the community at the Interior Department's 49th Awards Convocation in Washington D.C., today.

The Public Service Award of the Department was given to Frank H. Brown, chairman of the Cherokee Historical Association and John A. Crowe, principal chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

The award was for "activities that have perpetuated the history and culture of the Cherokee Indians of North Carolina, strengthened the economy of the Cherokee Indian Reservation and all of western North Carolina, and promoted an appreciation for the natural resource treasures of the Great Smoky Mountains."

The association, started in the late 1940's, has produced an outdoor, historical drama, Unto These Hills, which has been seen by some four million people since its first performance in 1950.

The Drama tells the story of the Cherokee hero, Tsali, who gave his life so that a remnant group of Cherokees could remain in their homeland the Great Smoky Mountains, when most of the Indians from the Southeast were being removed to Oklahoma.

The association also collected Cherokee artifacts and constructed in 1976 a modern museum in which to display them.

The Interior citation notes that the association “Has pulled from a dark chapter in American History worthwhile lessons in understanding and cooperation to bring about its unique accomplishments in local and regional community enterprise.