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First Peoples Fund Announces Awards to  
Culture Bearers Doing Vital Work in their Communities and  
Native Artists Building Business Skills

(RAPID CITY, SD) – First Peoples Fund, the oldest national organization dedicated to  
supporting Native American artists and culture bearers, recently named four (4)  
outstanding individuals from across the country as recipients of $25,000 unrestricted  
cash grants to continue their vital cultural work in Indigenous communities.

First Peoples Fund’s 2023 Jennifer Easton Community Spirit Award honorees are:

- **Charles Kealoha Leslie** (Kanaka Maoli) - Captain Cook, HI  
  Traditional Native Hawaiian Net-Making

- **Tom Stone** (Kanaka Maoli) - Kane’ohe, HI  
  Carving

- **Mary Thompson** (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) - Cherokee, NC  
  Basketry, Pottery, Quilting

- **Robert Charles Davidson Guud San Glans** (Haida, Tlingit) - White Rock, British Columbia  
  Carving, Dance, Sculpture, Storytelling

“As the coronavirus tears a destructive path through Indian Country, it’s taking a terrible  
toll on these tradition keepers who hold our ancestral knowledge,” said Lori Pourier  
(Oglala Lakota), president of the organization since 1999. “Our Community Spirit Award  
honorees are the heart and soul of First Peoples Fund and our tribal communities. Our  
support for them now is critical.”
Pourier said five of the 100 culture bearers recognized through the Community Spirit Awards have passed away in the last year, and nearly 20% have passed since the award began in 2000. In response, First Peoples Fund increased the amount from $10,000 to $25,000 and Pourier said they are actively raising funds to grow the awards dramatically. “These honorees are our knowledge holders. They embody our cultural assets and are our connection to ancestral knowledge, language, and identity,” Pourier said.

Named for First Peoples Fund’s founder Jennifer Easton, the award recognizes exceptional artists who have worked selflessly to weave their cultural knowledge and ancestral gifts into their communities. These practicing artists are nominated for the award by their students, mentees, fellow artists and other community members. Many honorees have gone on to receive prestigious recognition in national and international juried art exhibitions, the National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellowship and numerous Governor’s Awards, among many others.

First Peoples Fund has also selected fourteen (14) artists through its Artist in Business Leadership and fourteen (14) Cultural Capital Fellowship programs. See attached lists. Awarded annually, both fellowship programs include a $10,000 cash award and aim to increase artists’ capacity to succeed and impact their communities. While the Cultural Capital Fellowship emphasizes supporting individuals whose work focuses on passing down ancestral knowledge, the Artist in Business Leadership Fellowship nurtures and guides the business development goals of Native artists. Fellows receive $10,000 in project grants, technical support and professional training over the year.

“The 2023 fellowship cohort is an exciting and empowering mix of artists and culture bearers who are ensuring cultural and ancestral knowledge continues to be practiced in their communities,” said First Peoples Fund Fellowships Program Manager, Rachael Nez (Diné).

Pourier added, “We deeply believe in the transformative power of artists and culture bearers to strengthen and uplift communities. No matter their medium, each artist shares a story reflecting the incredible range of Indigenous cultures across the United States. Whether growing their entrepreneurial spirit or revitalizing, reconnecting and reclaiming ancient Indigenous practices, their work illuminates what is possible and inspires others. Their success creates a ripple effect that impacts their community and beyond.”
Support for First Peoples Fund fellowships and the Jennifer Easton Community Spirit Awards is provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Bay and Paul Foundation, Bush Foundation, California Wellness Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, HRK Foundation, Jerome Foundation, Justworks, Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Mize Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation, Novo Foundation, Sidney E. Frank Foundation, Solberg Manufacturing and many valued individual donors.

### 2023 Artist in Business Leadership Fellows

- Kalyn Barnoski *(Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)*
- Chase Earles *(Caddo)*
- Chanelle Gallagher *(Mille Lacs Ojibwe)*
- Bobby Brower *(Inupiaq)*
- Lisa Kennedy *(Saginaw Chippewa)*
- Denise Lajimodiere *(Turtle Mountain Chippewa)*
- Barbara Morgan *(Diné)*
- Golga Oscar *(Kasigluk Elders Traditional Council - Yup’ik Nation)*
- Luanne Redeye *(Seneca)*
- Erin Tripp *(Tlingit)*
- Delaena Uses Knife *(Lakota)*
- Wakaya Wells *(Choctaw)*
- Cheri Williams *(Ojibwe)*
- Nicole Willis *(Choctaw)*

### 2023 Cultural Capital Fellows

- Delbert Anderson *(Diné)*
- Adam Avery *(Saginaw Chippewa)*
- Alison Bremner *(Tlingit)*
- Sequoia Hauck *(White Earth Chippewa)*
- Joshua Homminga *(Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa)*
- James Pakootas *(Confederate Tribes of Colville)*
- Penny Kagigebi *(White Earth Ojibwe)*
- April Matson *(Sicangu Lakota, Athabaskan)*
- Barbara McAlister *(Cherokee Nation)*
- Daniel Mamamkin *(Colville Confederated Tribes)*
- Kelly O’Bennick *(Salish Kootenai)*
- Shawna Sunrise *(Diné, Kewa)*
- Carol Wilcox *(Oglala Lakota)*
- Jenny Williams *(Omaha, Nez Perce)*

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First Peoples Fund is a national values-based organization that honors and supports the Collective Spirit® of First Peoples artists and culture bearers. Collective Spirit®, that which manifests a self-awareness and sense of responsibility to sustain the cultural fabric of a community. We accomplish this by providing tools, resources and a voice to Indigenous artists who share their inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and gifts with their communities. First Peoples Fund sustains culture and cultivates entrepreneurial initiatives and community development programs for, and alongside, Native artists so that together we create an Indigenous Arts Ecology. For further information about First Peoples Fund, please visit www.firstpeoplesfund.org or contact us at collectivespirit@firstpeoplesfund.org.