
DEBWEWIN CITATIONS

Honouring excellence in journalism about Native issues.



Mandate

The Debwewin Citations are awards intended to recognize and encourage excellence in reporting about Native issues by aboriginal and non-native journalists.

Rationale

Due to the deficiencies of mainstream education curricula, most Canadians have been exposed to inaccurate and incomplete portrayals of aboriginal culture, tradition, and contemporary issues. As a result, mainstream media reporting is the primary public education source for information about Native issues, often with disastrous results.

“Aboriginal people are not well-represented by or in the media. Many Canadians know aboriginal people only as noble environmentalists, angry warriors, or pitiful victims. A full picture of their humanity is simply not available in the media. Mainstream media do not reflect aboriginal realities very well, nor do they offer much space to aboriginal peoples to tell their own stories.”

– Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996

Concept

“It does not require many words to speak the truth.”

– Chief Joseph, Nez Perce

Debwewin is an eastern Ojibwe word which translates into “truth” in English, but which literally means “speaking from the heart”.

Truth is one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinabek people, who believe that living a good life can only be accomplished through wisdom (*nbwaakaswin*), love (*zaagidwin*), respect (*mnaadendmowin*), bravery (*aakdehewin*), honesty (*gwekwaadziwin*), humility (*dbaadendiziwin*), and truth (*debwewin*).

For journalists, “truth” should mean more than accuracy; it also implies fairness, balance, and context.

Background

The Union of Ontario Indians is the oldest First Nation political organization in Ontario, representing the interests of 42 member communities of the Anishinabek Nation.

As part of its public education mandate, the UOI communications unit has undertaken several initiatives to create greater understanding of Native issues among non-native journalists.

In March, 2001, UOI Communications co-hosted a conference with Huntington University in Sudbury called *The Aboriginal Beat*. The conference’s final report included a recommendation to develop media curricula with an aboriginal component, and in September, 2001, Huntington included *The Aboriginal Beat* course in a new communications program offered jointly with Cambrian College’s journalism program.

Participants in *The Aboriginal Beat* conference – who included aboriginal and non-native communicators and activists – also suggested the need for greater networking between Native and non-native journalists to increase the media’s – and ultimately the public’s – awareness of aboriginal issues. In May, 2002, UOI Communications announced the launch of the *Debwewin Citations* for journalistic excellence in coverage of Native issues.

Criteria

Eligible entries will include published or broadcast news reports, feature stories, essays, books, or graphic images by journalists whose work has been distributed in English in the traditional territories of the Anishinabek Nation. **Nominees should have demonstrated a sustained and ongoing commitment to coverage of Native issues that is judged to be balanced and contextual, as well as accurate.**

Debwewin Citations may be awarded to news and media organizations for outstanding contributions to public education about Native issues, to recognize individual lifetime achievement in Native-issues journalism, or to honour educators for their roles in creating more awareness about aboriginal people and issues.

Nominations

Each year, the Debwewin Citations Selection Committee, co-ordinated by the Union of Ontario Indians communications unit, will solicit and evaluate nominations for the Debwewin Citations. Nomination forms will appear in the Anishinabek News and on the UOI website, and may be submitted to the UOI head office to the attention of the Communications Unit.

- By mail:
Communications Unit
Union of Ontario Indians
Nipissing First Nation
P.O. Box 711, North Bay, Ontario
P1B 8J8
- By FAX: 705-497-9135
- By E-mail: news@anishinabek.ca

Anyone may submit a nomination, but all nominations must be endorsed in writing by a citizen of a First Nation in Ontario.

Winner will be announced on --- , at the ---.

The Awards

One journalist will be honoured with Debwewin Citations, and will receive a unique award designed on an aboriginal motif, plus \$500 individual cash award. Honourable Mentions may be awarded to two other nominees, who will each receive plaques and \$100 cash awards.

The Anishinabek News and Union of Ontario Indians website will publish samples of the journalism produced by winners of Debwewin Citations, and freelance articles submitted by the aboriginal journalism student.

For more information contact:

Maurice Switzer
Director of Communications
Union of Ontario Indians
Phone: 705-497-9127, ext. 2272
Email: swimau@anishinabek.ca