

**Ktunaxa
Citizens
Excellence
Honour
Awards
2026**



Lifetime Achievement

Nominee: Martina Jimmy
Nominator: Carol Louie
Category: Cultural Knowledge and Language

Martina (Tina) worked her entire career as a worker in Cranbrook schools. She was always a friendly face for aboriginal students to connect with.

Martina continues to give as a volunteer in her community in fundraising and community events, including the powwow committee. She is active as an Elder in her community and the Ktunaxa Nation, always helping others and stepping up without hesitation.



Nominee: Chris Luke Sr.
Nominator: Cherie Luke
Category: Cultural Knowledge and Language

Even in retirement, Chris Sr. continues to take the time to teach and support the leadership through cultural practices and protocol. Chris is always available when called upon and embodies “everything we do, we do for Ktunaxa” through one-on-one teaching, group supports, elders group and lands advisory committee.

The continuity of our ways, and the deep connection of carrying on the traditions, beliefs and teachings of being Ktunaxa.

Nominee: Violet Marjorie Birdstone
Nominator: Sharon Warden
Category: Cultural Knowledge and Language

Violet (Vi) has been actively working most of her adult life preserving Ktunaxa language and culture as a Ktunaxa linguist and language consultant & activist. Her perseverance and dedication in a lifelong journey of passing on the language is beyond commendable.

In 2025, Vi received an honorary degree from UBC. She has made many significant contributions to the advancement of land and environmental work of many BC First Nations through her work as a legal researcher.



Citizen Recognition Awards

Arts and Entertainment

Nominee: Dusty Hagerud

Nominator: Rosemary Phillips & Debra Hagerud

Dusty is a Ktunaxa citizen with ancestral ties to both Yaqit ʔa·knuqʰi't and Yaqan Nukiy. He began his career journey in 2003 at the Capilano University studying Aboriginal Film & Television, now known as the Indigenous Filmmaking program. Dusty also studied in Capilano University's Illustration and Design Elements & Applications.

Dusty found his calling in the art of puppetry as a fabricator, puppeteer, performer, and wrangler. He has worked in the television, theatre and advertising industries for over 27 years. His company Color Sound Lab has been involved in many notable productions including the Barbarian and the Troll on Nickelodeon and more recently in 2022 for the Jim Henson Creature Shop on the new Fraggles Rock – Back to the Rock production on Apple+ which won two Emmy's including Outstanding Costume and Design Styling.

More recently, Dusty has had the pleasure of teaming up with some of the Jim Henson Creature Shop team for an upcoming episode of Star Trek Brave New Worlds Season 4.

Dusty is an inspiration to Ktunaxa youth and an example of following one's dreams down a not-so-beaten path.



Business and Career

Nominee: Cheryl Casimer

Nominator: Denise Birdstone

Cheryl has dedicated her life to the protection of Ktunaxa Rights and Title first through the Ktunaxa Treaty process and then through the First Nations' Summit. Through the latter, several changes in legislation have benefited not just the Ktunaxa, but all First Nations.

Cheryl served as co-chair of the First Nations Summit for two years before being elected to the Political Executive of the First Nations Summit. She was the first woman to be re-elected to the Political Executive not just once but three times.

Cheryl has sat at the table resulting in many legislative changes in both Canada and BC including (to name a few) the creation of Bill C92, An Act respecting FN, Inuit and Metis Children, Youth and Families, DRIPA, and BC's first poverty reduction strategy which based on her input changed how the BC government dealt with benefits such as the Indian Residential School payments, etc. received by FN people no longer being deducted from pension benefits, income assistance, disability, etc. Cheryl continues to fight for Aboriginal Rights and Title as the Nasukin of Aqam.



Nominee: Amber Louie
Nominator: Denice Louie

Amber is recognized as a trailblazer in Indigenous healthcare. Her work is a powerful example of how cultural safety and humility, advocacy and lived experience can drive systemic change and improve health outcomes for Indigenous communities.

Amber has played a pivotal role in shaping cultural safety and anti-racism practice standards. Her contributions have helped implement cultural safety and humility standards in BC, ensuring that Indigenous voices are central to health policy development. These efforts have also been recognized nationally and internationally with presentations at conferences such as the Canadian Public Health Association Conference and the American Public Health Association Conference.

Amber is also an advocate of mentorship and cultural identity and actively supports land-based healing camps and encourages indigenous youth to embrace their heritage and pursue careers in healthcare.

She credits her aunt Christine Louie, who was also a nurse, with inspiring her to become a nurse. She saw gaps between the social and health sectors in her community and realized that nursing could be a way to bridge those gaps and create meaningful change.

Amber is a strong, mindful Ktunaxa woman. The work that she is doing to transform the landscape in health services in Canada will also have a positive impact on Ktunaxa Nation members receiving health services.



Nominee: Shay and Dusty's Catering
Nominator: Julia McCrory

Shay had a dream of opening her own catering business, and this year she accomplished that dream. Her catering company offers awesome food for all kinds of meetings.



Cultural Knowledge and Language

Nominee: Caitlin Phillips
Nominator: Darcy Roshau

Caiti has been on a reconnecting journey for a few years now, and she is consistently working hard to learn all she can about language and culture and is more than willing to share the knowledge she has learned with others.

Caiti is a safe person within the Nation for others to rely on for cultural questions, and just someone to talk to about anything.

Being able to share so kindly what she has learned is often rare, as there are still many people that hold their knowledge and don't share it. It is so important that we are able to pass on the knowledge we have gained, and Caiti is such a great example of that.



Education

Nominee: Faye O'Neil

Nominator: Joan O'Neil

Faye has worked as the Indigenous Coordinator with School District 5 since 2017 and has a tremendously positive impact on many students over the years. She has also served with other school districts across the province prior to 2017.

Faye has represented the Ktunaxa Nation on many boards and committees, bringing Ktunaxa values, ways of doing and being to many levels of the province's education system.



Sports

Nominee: Maci Basil

Nominator: Tina Jimmy

Maci is proud of her Ktunaxa culture. Maci is a basketball star, coach and powwow dancer, and is always focused on helping others.



Nominee: Jaspen Lewisia Ellenwood

Nominator: Connie Desjarlais

Jaspen has always been passionate about volleyball. From a young age she knew she wanted to play at the next level and had worked hard for many years towards her goal.

Jaspen is currently a third-year setter and plays volleyball on Haskell University, NAIA team. She has excelled at her sport was selected and invited to play volleyball in Greece. The selection criteria were statistical leaders, All-conference accolades and coach recommendations.

Jaspen has been named Conference Setter of the week on several occasions. She was also named Academic All-conference in 2024-2025. In addition to her impressive achievements in her sport, she received her associate's degree in business in the fall of 2025 and is currently on track to graduate with a Bachelor of Business in May 2027.

Jaspen remains dedicated to powwow dancing and attending our Jump Dances.

Jaspen understands the importance of taking care of herself, physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally to create the opportunities she wants.



Nominee: Alexander (AJ) Ellenwood
Nominator: Connie Desjarlais

Alexander played 4 years of Collegiate basketball at the Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas. As a freshman, he was a starter and played his first university game in his first year, which is a big deal in a 4-year school. He was also a starter in his last game as a Senior this year.

Alexander always kept his grades up and stuck to his true path of getting an education while playing basketball at the next level. In addition to the high demands of being a student athlete, he still grass dances when he has the opportunity. Alexander loves to grass dance and has been a grass dancer since he could walk. He has been asked to be the Head Man Dancer at the Haskell Graduation powwow in May.

As a young Ktunaxa/Nimiipuu man from Aqam, AJ's achievements show all our Ktunaxa youth that they can ALL be capable of being successful at the university level, not only in education but also in sports.

Representation matters and seeing one of our own succeed inspires us all to achieve our goals. It doesn't have to be one or the other; we can be successful in both areas of our lives.



Language Learners Awards

Language Learners Awards are given to those that have achieved a specific milestone in the number of hours they have dedicated themselves to their language learning through attending language classes.

The categories are as follows:

Seedling – over 100 hours

Bud – over 300 hours

Bloom – over 500 hours

Master Apprentice – over 800 hours

This year's recipients are:

Name	Category
Arwen Buckman	Bloom
Niobe Buckman	Bloom
Consuelo Cutsack	Bloom
Joyce Green	Bud
Emaline Manuel	Master Apprentice
Samantha Sutherland	Bloom
Vickie Thomas	Bloom
Loretta Wingo	Bud
Denise Nelson	Seedling
Leanna Gravelle	Master Apprentice

Congratulations to you all!





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NATION