

## **MIEA ANNOUNCES 2005 AWARD WINNERS**

The following were recognized for their outstanding work and commitment to excellence in Indian education at the 24th Annual Montana Indian Education Conference held in Helena Montana April 2-5, 2005. Each of these individuals has taken that extra step to help strengthen the educational opportunities and services to Indian students in Montana's schools and colleges. MIEA congratulates them on their achievements.

*Excerpts from the nominations and letters of support follow each of the Award winners.*

### **MARY LUKIN - Indian Educator of the Year**

MSU, Bozeman, Box 173950, Bozeman, MT 59717

(Director, Advance By Choice, Montana State University, member of the Blackfeet Tribe)

Mary Lukin is retiring this year after mentoring thousands of Indian students in her 27 years work at Montana State University (MSU), Advance by Choice. She has been a national leader in the TRIO programs (Upward Bound, Student Special Services, etc.) for over 25 years. Mary has worked hard to establish MSU's very successful project and because of her leadership, MSU and Montana are national models of success in TRIO programming. She has been a strong proponent of women and minorities in engineering and science related disciplines. "Because of Mary's mentoring and assistance, hundreds of Montana's brightest Native students have achieved their dream of receiving a college degree. These students are now teachers and administrators, doctors and lawyers, themselves mentors to others." (colleague at MSU). Mary understands that education is the key for building successful Indian communities and strengthening tribal institutions. Mary endeavored to create an atmosphere where students were both welcomed and challenged. "She had high standards for us – the students she worked with – and we were committed to meeting her expectations. She never doubted that any of us would fulfill our aspirations and often believed in us long before we knew we could accomplish great things...Mary is very proud of each student she worked with, but we the students she touched with her kindness and generosity are the ones who stand inspired by Mary's commitment to us." (a former student) She works tirelessly in her efforts to make a friendly and accessible campus through her work as the Director of ABC. Her lasting legacy is those MSU Indian graduates who fondly remember Mary as mentor, friend and colleague.

### **LEO BIRD, Indian High School Teacher of the Year**

Box 610, Browning High School, Browning, MT 594117

(Browning High School Science Teacher, Veteran, and member of the Blackfeet Tribe)

Mr. Bird is an outstanding science teacher at Browning High School. His science curriculum includes Blackfeet legends, language and culture. His most recent curriculum is Astronomy from the Blackfeet perspective. He and his students often gather late in the evenings with his astronomy equipped labs. His classes are popular among students with waiting lists of those who want to get in. Mr. Bird's class is filled with students and many other teachers who engage in early morning traditional prayer with the aroma of sweetgrass or sweetpine burning through the long hallways of the science classrooms. After school, he instructs credit deficient students or others who need tutoring. In addition to astronomy, he teaches chemistry and biology. Mr. Bird uses a combination of hands on project work, tons of encouragement, and constant respect to motivate our students. Mr. Bird is an excellent teacher quite simply because of the passion he has for the subject area and the unconditional respect and caring that he extends to his students.

**CYNTHIA BIG BACK - Indian Elementary Teacher of the Year**

Box 96, Lame Deer Elementary, Lame Deer, MT 59043

(Lame Deer School 3rd grade teacher, member of the Chippewa Cree Tribe)

Cindy is a dedicated, caring teacher that has 26 years teaching experience in the elementary grades on the Rocky Boy and Northern Cheyenne reservations. Her students are “her kids.” Cindy knows how and when to hug a child and over the years she has received many hugs from former students that thank her for expecting the best from them. She is a great role model for the students and for her peers. Students that leave Cindy’s classes remember her as a teacher who cared about them. She is a teacher that leads by example. Cindy has always been very receptive to learn new strategies to teach reading to struggling students and has implemented them in her classroom. She is often sought after by her peers for advice on various issues dealing with Native American students. She is held in high esteem by all.

**ANGELA BELL - Indian Support Staff of the Year**

Lame Deer Elementary, Lame Deer, MT 59043

(Lame Deer School Elementary Counselor, member of the Assiniboine Tribe)

Angela has her Masters of Education in Career Guidance and Counseling. She worked in Browning, Poplar, and in Lame Deer. She has worked with Indian students in grades K-6 during her 22 years. She does individual counseling in Grades K-5 (prevention, social skills, self-esteem, getting along with others, working with parents and teachers). “She has allowed our children to dream their dreams and achieve their goals as young Native leaders....what Ms. Bell does is from her heart...she makes our children proud of who they are and gives them the strength to showcase all their beautiful talents.” She meets weekly with the Drug and Alcohol Counselor and the Crisis intervention team. She has helped implement the anti-bullying policy. She is involved in helping to develop the Culture and Language curriculum for the Northern Cheyenne Standards to be used in the schools. During the summer months, Angela participates in the Pow Wows and contest in Golden Age Women’s Traditional. She also raises and trains quarter horses.

**PEARL MC GILLIS - Special Recognition**

Wakina Sky, 436 N. Jackson, Helena, MT 59601

(Wakina Sky Cultural and Outreach Coordinator, Helena, member of Assiniboine Tribe)

“Her continuous work promoting culture and history of Montana is exemplary. Pearl teaches K-12 students and also encourages the urban Indian community to return to learning skills of custom traditional beading, tanning, use of various animals and herbal use. Her presence in the community is always with open arms and acceptance of all people interested in American Indians. Each day she “gathers” our children and as Wakina Sky’s cultural instructor, whisks them to older, deeper sacred places of our past. This woman serves as one of our “grandmothers,” the person with knowledge, patience and compassion. Trust me, this Assiniboine woman, Pearl, will not allow our ways to be gone.”

**TANA STEWART - Indian High School Student of the Year**

Hardin High School, 702 North Terry Avenue, Hardin, MT 59034

(Student at Hardin High School, member of the Crow Tribe, parents are Linda Pease and Joseph Stewart)

Tana has participated in basketball for 4 years, lettering 3, track for 4 years, lettering 4, and cross country for 2 years, lettering 2. She is the Vice President of the Indian Club, AISES for 4 years and chorus for 3 years. Tana was Hardin's 2004 Homecoming Queen. She also competes in traditional fancy shawl division. "I have never witnessed a single occasion where she has been unkind, negative, disrespectful, or intolerant. Tana has shown that it is possible with the support of family, school, and community to maintain cultural connections and excel in all aspects of life.