ANNOUNCING 2023 Awardees of the FAI Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala

First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide Alaska Native advocacy nonprofit, is proud to announce our 12th Annual Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala Awardees. The Gala will be held in-person in Dgheyey Kaq’, Dena’inaq ełnen’aq’ qilan (Anchorage, Alaska; lands of the Dena’ina) on Saturday, November 18th. Named in recognition of late Howard Rock (Iñupiaq) and Senator Ted Stevens, the Smokehouse Gala celebrates significant contributions of Alaska Native peoples and our friends in advancing our collective wellbeing, and the essential role of healing each other. With deep respect and gratitude, the FAI Trustees and Staff are honored to uplift and celebrate our peoples, cultures, communities, friends and families.

Howard Rock Alaska Native Leader Award
Aviññaq Terri Walker (Iñupiaq)

This person has shown through their quality of character and effort to be a leader of distinct caliber because they put their community and people before themselves.

Aviññaq Terri Walker is Iñupiaq, raised in Buckland by her grandfather Sam Hadley where she later graduated from Nunachiam Sissauni High School. Upon completing her teaching degree from Sheldon Jackson College, she served the Nunachiam Sissauni School as a teacher for 16 years and its principal for 9 years. She has since served in many leadership roles uplifting the critical role of education, including as the Director of State in the District Office in Kotzebue in Federal Programs, as Assistant Superintendent, and member on the Iñuit Circumpolar Conference education committee.

As Aviññaq has sought throughout her career to improve the education of Iñuit, she accepted the position as the Superintendent of Northwest Arctic Borough School District this year. She values a subsistence lifestyle and feels blessed to live close to family and continue to carry out the traditions of her Ancestors, saying “What I stand for is that all students receive the best education by providing the skills and values they need to lead a productive and independent life in the NANA region.”

First Alaskans Institute Young Native Leader Award
Qapgaraq Corina Kramer (Iñupiaq)

This young leader has shown through dedication they are working to help Native peoples and our community with significant and profound purpose.

Qapgaraq Corina Kramer is the Director of Operations at Aqqaluk Trust in Kotzebue, where she works on Iñupiaq language & culture program development. She has successfully developed the Trust’s in-house programs, Leadership Thru Generations and Sivu Summer, and is leading their university partnership programs, the Rematriation Project and the Iñupiatun Coding Project.
Qaagraq is a founding member, board, and faculty of Siamit, a program at Harvard’s Center for Global Health and Social Medicine. She’s a developer and course instructor for transforming Arctic research into equitable & sovereign Indigenous-led partnerships. Qaagraq teaches the integration of Iñupiaq values into western business, ethics, education, research, and health practices. She’s a media producer, advisor, publication author, and presenter for various projects which promote cultural understanding, healthy lifestyles, and the social issues affecting Alaska Natives. Qaagraq has worked directly with youth for over 25 years and is passionate about building the next generation of Iñupiaq leaders who live out and pass down their traditional knowledge and values. She is the granddaughter of the late Alfred Sr. and Hannah Wells of Noorvik and is married to Lance Qaluraq Kramer of Kotzebue. Together they have 5 children and 2 beautiful granddaughters.

Friends of First Alaskans Ted Stevens Award
Sue McHenry

This award is given to a person that has shown through their support of Native issues and partnership with our common cause that they are friends of the Alaska Native community.

Sue McHenry has served the University of Alaska Fairbanks with distinction from 1972 to 2008 and has made outstanding contributions to the University through her role as advisor with the Rural Student Services program; and has constantly sought ways to create supportive networks for students. Sue has dedicated her career to advising and mentoring countless students, many of whom credit their academic and personal accomplishments to her guidance. She has been instrumental in developing the University chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, which has been named national chapter of the year five times under her mentorship; and has helped coordinate the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program; whereas both of these roles have resulted in students outstanding success and those involved in the programs.

FAI is proud to congratulate each of these inspiring leaders! Their brilliant minds paired with a deep love and unwavering voice for our Alaska Native peoples allows them to make tremendous contributions to our communities statewide. The many ways they do this across sectors, regions, and generations, is a testament to their impact and the critical role they and all other Alaskans can play in lifting up and celebrating the Native peoples of this incredible place. Gunalchéesh to the Awardee’s families and communities for supporting them in all they’ve done for our Native peoples and all of Alaska!

To buy a ticket, table, or sponsor the Smokehouse Gala, please visit our website. Please call (907) 677-1700 or email info@firstalaskans.org with any questions.

At First Alaskans Institute, we know we are responsible for carrying more than 10,000 years of ancestral knowledge into the future with rigor, humor, resilience, vigilance, and love. To learn more, please visit www.firstalaskans.org or contact us at info@firstalaskans.org.