

PRESS RELEASE

A Thousand Powerful Words

WASHINGTON, D.C. - March 1, 2007 - Reconnecting The Circle awards 10 essay winners \$2,500.

The mission of **Reconnecting The Circle** is to encourage people to learn about contemporary Native American people and cultures, as well as to provide a more positive, meaningful, and complete perspective on Indian Country.

The heart of that mission was presented in the launch of Reconnecting The Circle's debut initiative – a **National High School Essay Contest** – in November 2006 to coincide with **National American Indian Heritage Month**. High school students were encouraged to explore the topic - “Why is reconnecting the circle with Native Americans important today”?

“This essay contest encourages Indians and non-Indians to thoughtfully examine the contributions of American Indians over the last several centuries and positively look for ways those contributions are to be valued by the American society. It is a way to see through triteness, stereotypes and ignorance that so often plague Indian Country.”

– Chad Smith, Principal Chief, Cherokee Nation

High school students (grades 9-12) from tribal, public, private and parochial schools throughout all 50 states were invited to participate. Writers included a cross-section of both **Native American and non-Native students** – kids from federally recognized tribes, kids with known Native American heritage without tribal affiliation, and non-Native kids from a multitude of ethnicities.

Reconnecting The Circle awarded 10 winners in total. Each winner will receive a check for \$2,500.

The 2006 winners are:

1. Megan Ketelboeter, Truth or Consequences, NM
2. Nancy S. Tate, Wichita, KS
3. Christopher French, Delaware, OH
4. Karissa RL Trahan, Ronan, MT
5. Caitlin Parker, Ft. Gibson, OK
6. Stephanie Tsosie, Winslow, AZ
7. Isaiah Berg, Fargo, ND
8. Alicia D.K. Nowell, Harbor Springs, MI
9. Diana Hunter, Aurora, CO
10. Diana L. Onco, Tahlequah, OK

A team of 12 reviewers scored the essays against a criteria matrix consisting of originality and creativity, relevance to topic, and structure. Reviewers included both Native American and non-Native people. The top finalists' essays were then handed off to the judges.

The three judges were:

1. David W. Anderson (Choctaw/Chippewa), Entrepreneur and Founder of The LifeSkills Center for Leadership
2. Jacqueline Gant (Oneida Nation of the Thames), Executive Director, Native American Business Alliance

3. Robin Butterfield (Winnebago/Chippewa), Minority Community Outreach Office, National Education Association, and Board Member of the National Indian Education Association

"I found the essays moving and inspirational. It was an honor and a privilege to participate as a judge."
- Jackie Gant, National Executive Director, Native American Business Alliance

Reconnecting The Circle partnered with the **National Congress of American Indians** and the **Boys and Girls Clubs of America** to promote the contest. **Cherokee Nation Education Corporation** is the acting 501(c)3 partner.

Sponsors for the 2006 program were Cherokee Nation, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Oneida Trust Department, HoChunk, Inc., National Indian Gaming Association, David W. Anderson, Dakota Integrated Systems, Chugach Alaska Corporation, Seminole Tribe of Florida, Bi-Star Corporation, Walden Asset Management, Susan White, Danielle Gaines and other individuals.

For more information about this initiative and future programs, please contact Danielle Gaines at danielle@reconnectingthecircle.com or via phone at 650-888-9263. You can also visit the website at www.reconnectingthecircle.com.