



HPSD employees recognized as recipients of the 2010 Esquao Awards

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SLAVE LAKE, AB – Two High Prairie School Division employees have been formally recognized as recipients of this year's Esquao Awards by the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW).

The employees – E.G. Wahlstrom School Grade 6 Teacher Brenda Laboucan and Freida Hook, FNMI (First Nation, Metis and Inuit) Liaison Worker at Roland Michener Secondary School (RMSS) – received the award at the 15th Annual Esquao Awards Gala held on May 1, 2010 at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton.



Freida Hook and Brenda Laboucan.

Each year IAAW honours 20 Alberta Aboriginal Women at the Esquao Awards. These awards are given in recognition of the achievements and contributions of Aboriginal women within their respective communities.

Laboucan's award was based on her ongoing commitment and involvement within the community. Nominated by her daughter, Sonya, she graduated from the University of Calgary in 1980 and began her career as a teacher with Northlands School Division.

"My first position was teaching Grade 1 to 27 Cree students at Jean Baptiste Sewepagaham School in Fox Lake," Laboucan says.

She spent the next 11 years as a teacher and later as a vice-principal, acting principal and supervisor of curriculum and instruction when Little Red Cree Nation took over the school jurisdiction.

From there, Laboucan moved to Slave Lake (in August of 1991) and has resided in the community ever since.

"As my five children grew, so did their interests, and whichever group/organization got my kids – they also got me," says Laboucan, who feels extremely fortunate in her life to have been blessed with so many great people around her.

Highlights of her community involvement over the years include chairing the Arctic Winter Games and serving as a volunteer on the cultural and entertainment committee, involvement with the Slave Lake Minor Ball Association, Dancin' Kids, Slave Lake Figure Skating Club, Roland Michener Music Support Society, Slave Lake Minor Hockey and Soccer Associations, and most recently on the Northern Haven Support Society and Victim Services.

Hook's award, meanwhile, fell under the category of education. She began her career as a teacher's assistant at Roland Michener and has been in the Native liaison role for 26 years. She is described as an inspiration and role model within the community by providing a comfortable environment for parents to discuss their children's educational and personal goals. "Mrs. Hook uses a firm, but gentle, respectful approach when working with students. The shoulder to cry on, the listening ear, the lady with an incredible sense of humour; Freida Hook is an outstanding woman in the field of education," says Lisa Palko, assistant principal at RMSS. The annual IAAW Esquao Awards gala reaches out to women and brings light to their significant accomplishments by promoting their self-determination and community contributions.

Aboriginal women are nominated by their communities from various regions of the province in a number of categories including Arts & Entertainment, Performing Arts, Business, Science & Technology, Community Involvement, Social Services & Advocacy, Literature & Visual Arts, Justice, Education, Health & Medicine, Culture and Lifetime Achievement.

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