

# NAJA Offers Plenty For Pros and Students, Too

■ *Smoke Signals* staffers win eight writing and photography awards.

By Ron Karten

Pulitzer Prize winning *The New York Times* reporter Charlie LeDuff (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians), arrived in Green Bay, Wisconsin for the Native American Journalists Association's (NAJA) annual conference from his new beat in California and hot off covering war in Iraq (see related story). *Prairie Band Potawatomi News* reporter Mary L. Young drove 12 hours across Kansas to avoid the hassles of plane travel these days, and stopped along the way to cover an election story. *Smoke Signals* Editor Brent Merrill and Web/Graphics Designer Willie Mercier, both Grand Ronde Tribal members, flew into Green Bay after covering a timber summit in North Carolina.

Hundreds of Indian reporters, editors, photographers, design specialists and journalism students came from across America to take in four days of nationally-noted speakers, workshops, networking, native cultural experiences and the awards ceremony at the group's 19th Annual conference. It was partly business as usual, but also a highlight of the year for those who saw their work honored. The Sovereign Nation of Oneida hosted the event.

Students at both high school and college levels arrived three days early to publish newspapers and produce television and radio broadcasts during the conference. High school kids, including a few even younger, published a single issue called, *Rising Voice*, at the beginning of the four-day session, and the college troops published a daily edition called, *Native Voice*.

Students interested in broadcast journalism and those interested in print worked together in what Television Coordinator Mary Kim Titla (San Carlos Apache), reporter for KPNX-TV in Phoenix, called a "convergence" of talents. Five students worked on television, five on

radio broadcasts and 11 on print publications, she said. Newspapers were distributed daily, radio work was recorded and available for playback in house, and television work appeared on closed circuit



**Leader** — The 2003 Native American Journalist's Association Conference was held in Green Bay, Wisconsin this year. 2000 vice presidential candidate Winona LaDuke was one of the keynote speakers at the conference. LaDuke, a 1982 graduate of Harvard, provides vision and leadership to many. Hundreds of Native journalists from across the country converged to share ideas, learn new techniques, and be recognized for their efforts over the past year.

monitors throughout the Radisson Hotel in Green Bay where the conference was held.

"We tried to create a real newsroom atmosphere with real deadlines," said Titla.

Youngest of the students was eighth grader Ashley Sarah Jaywin White (Forest County [Wisconsin] Potawatomi). "I didn't know anything about journalism," she said. "I learned how to condense stories. I used to be real shy. I learned to be a little more open."

On the opposite end of the experience line was Pulitzer Prize winner Jacqui Banaszynski, once an

Editor of *The Oregonian*, who coled a workshop called, "Truth in Metaphor," which also was the title for the entire conference. Her keynote speech continued the focus on metaphor though she spoke more

generally about the role of stories in our lives.

"Think very very clearly about what the story means for readers," she said, and counseled reporters that though they may be writing about particular people involved with particular incidents, they can also be writing about "universals", or situations that repeat themselves around the world and from culture to culture.

In that regard, she threw in a few other telling observations. She quoted painter Pablo Picasso, who said that "art is a lie that tells you the truth," and that "propaganda is a metaphor used for lying."

"I need stories to know I'm not alone," she said.

In a session on photography called, "Capturing Defining Moments," *Green Bay Press Gazette* Photo Editor Steve Levin said that photographing tragedies can, like participating in a war, create post traumatic stress. "You're unaware when you're shooting, but after, you can become unstable, haunted by the situation."

In a bit of advice that is probably as important for lay people to know as professionals, Levin said that it is not always the best idea to enter difficult situations with a camera blazing. "You have to think of a way to engage these people. Don't bring the camera out until they're ready."

And advice that came out again and again for reporters as well as photographers: patience. It is important to "build a relationship," said Levin, in order "to get the emotion."

Winona LaDuke, (Ojibwe) Indian activist and in the last national election, Green Party Vice Presidential candidate, said that compelling Indian stories await coverage. She described the challenge in Washington, D.C. ("either you are at the table or on the menu,") and the challenge from her own backyard, where her nephew was killed in a fall at an EPA Superfund site.

Paul DeMain, editor and publisher of *News from Indian Country*, described his turnaround after years of supporting Leonard Peltier, and brought those in attendance up to date on the Peltier camp's lawsuit against DeMain.

National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) has joined NAJA "to offer to all Americans a web-based, Native American point-of-view on the three-year commemoration of the Lewis & Clark bicentennial commemoration," according to a NATHPO handout at the session. "Many Nations: News from the Lewis and Clark Trail" is found at [www.nathpo.org](http://www.nathpo.org).

Discussion ranged from the correct pronunciation of Sacajawea's name to the possibility that tourist development along the Lewis & Clark trail will destroy important Indian cultural sites in the process.

"This is a particularly good opportunity to do good journalism (for a mainstream paper) with Native flavor," said Kara Briggs (Yakama), a Project Advisory Member, a reporter for *The Oregonian* and former NAJA president.

The issue of Indian mascots again came up, fanned by a decision at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* to abandon its nine-year-old policy banning use of Indian nicknames. Angry Indian reporters peppered the paper's managing editor with questions about the paper's policy on using slurs of other minority groups.

Exciting and unifying as the conference was for Native media people, it did not ignore disagreements among participants. Students challenged the "Reading Red Report" concerning Indian mascots by *The Oregonian's* Briggs. "Report flawed in quest to ban mascots" ran a *Native Voice* headline one day. "I am deeply concerned about a variety of issues in the article," Briggs shot back in a Letter to the Editor. And *Native Voice* defended itself in a compelling show of a real world journalistic battle.

The documentary film, "The Leech and the Earthworm," by Debra Harry (Northern Paiute), took on scientists collecting genetic material from indigenous people, and then selling the genetic information to corporations who patent it. ■



Photos by Brent Merrill

**Native Voice** — Harlan McKosato, host of *Native America Calling*, the first and only nationally syndicated radio show produced by Native Americans, emceed the 2003 NAJA Awards dinner.