



**INDIGENOUS
NIAGARA**
OUTSTANDING
ACHIEVEMENT
AWARDS

NAIR

NIAGARA
ACADEMY FOR
**INDIGENOUS
RELATIONS**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exceptional Leaders Honoured at the 2026 Indigenous Niagara Outstanding Achievement Awards

Niagara's Indigenous leaders, artists, and educators celebrated in an emotionally charged ceremony anchored in artistic freedom, reconciliation, and cultural integrity.

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ON — With resounding applause, powerful music, and deeply moving stories, the **2026 Indigenous Niagara Outstanding Achievement Awards (INOAA)** unfolded in a highly engaging event. Now in its seventh year, the awards continue to honour those shaping the Indigenous cultural, educational, and artistic landscape across the Niagara region — including this year, a very special recognition honouring an organization with a century of advocacy.

Held in Niagara College's Yerich Auditorium, this year's awards ceremony was hosted by **Tim Johnson**, president of the Niagara Academy for Indigenous Relations, and **Dr. Jennifer Brant**, Board member of the Academy and associate professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

"From nomination through selection, these Awards are determined and confirmed through a peer-review process that incorporates acknowledgement, affirmation, sincerity and respect, mixed with joy," said Tim Johnson. "As a result, the atmosphere in the room becomes something special as the audience itself plays an active role in helping recipients to deeply understand and feel the merits of their accomplishments."

"These Awards honour the 'heart' work of individuals whose work isn't always uplifted and sometime goes unrecognized," said Dr. Jennifer Brant. "In today's society many awards begin with self-nomination, something that challenges Indigenous teachings about humility. The Niagara Academy for Indigenous Relations process aligns with traditional structures where community members come together to identify the significant contributions of awardees. As a previous recipient myself, being recognized by peers from my Indigenous community was a high honour."

From accomplished artists to nationally celebrated scholars, creators, and civic leaders, the Awards presented a stellar lineup that highlighted the extraordinary achievements of professionals across six categories including: Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Intellectual Advancement, Language and Culture, Empathic Traditions, and Two-Row Alliance. In addition, a seventh category was created for this year, entitled the Special Service Distinction Award. The 2026 INOAA recipients are as follows:

Visual Arts: Chief Arnold Jacobs

An Onondaga Turtle Clan artist and condeoled Confederacy Chief from Six Nations of the Grand River whose work over three generations has secured the persistence of Haudenosaunee identity through imagery involving classic stories, symbols, and metaphors.

Performing Arts: Joshua Arden Miller

Born and raised in Six Nations of the Grand River, this award-winning Bear Clan Onondaga musician, who has been working professionally since the age of 14, is known for being a popular band leader throughout the Niagara Region and has performed on national and international stages to great acclaim.

Intellectual Advancement: Dr. Alan Corbiere

A Ruffed Grouse Clan Anishinaabe from M'Chigeeng First Nation on Manitoulin Island, he served in numerous knowledge-based roles, earned a PhD, holds a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Indigenous history, and currently serves as an Associate Professor in the History Department at York University.

Language and Culture: Tahnee Bennett

A Turtle Clan Mohawk from Six Nations of the Grand River, who, as a mother, daughter, sister, auntie, and Kanyen'keha (Mohawk language) enthusiast, she is a public-school teacher who has dedicated herself to the revitalization, preservation, and sharing of the Kanyen'keha language.

Empathic Traditions: Fallon Farinacci

A proud Red River Métis from St. Eustache, Manitoba, she is a child survivor, advocate, and public speaker for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, as well as others of diverse orientations and gender identities who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to preserving, promoting, and embodying values of empathy, ethics, and compassion.

Two-Row Alliance: Mayor Wayne Redekop

A municipal leader who has been engaged closely with the Indigenous community including involvement in initiatives to promote local access to health, and primary and urgent care services, protecting the Town's natural and cultural heritage, supporting inclusion and diversity, and for creating partnerships and strategic alliances, including those with Indigenous peoples.

Special Service Distinction

Given to the Indian Defense League of America, an extraordinary organization now in its 100th year of operation, that has served as a consistent reminder to Indigenous peoples and nations of their inherent national sovereignties, of their Treaty Rights to cross the "recently" established international border, and of the enduring responsibilities of governments to recognize and respect those rights. Receiving the award on behalf of the entire organization were, from the western side of the Niagara River, Shirley Squire and Amber Squire — and — from the eastern side of the River, Marilyn Isaacs and Mary Ann Maracle.

"The Indigenous Niagara Outstanding Achievement Awards are a wonderful opportunity to come together and celebrate the people, achievements and contributions that make our communities stronger," said Niagara College President Sean Kennedy. "This year's recognition of the Indian Defense League of America, as it marks 100 years of advocacy, is especially meaningful given its deep connection to the Niagara region and the Indigenous communities whose histories and relationships extend across the international border. It reminds us of the importance of upholding

Treaty rights, honouring the history and leadership that have brought us to this point, and recognizing that this work continues today. At Niagara College, we are grateful for the opportunity to listen, learn, and celebrate alongside Indigenous communities as we advance our commitment to Reconciliation.”

“For those of us who study history and seek to learn from events and circumstances of the past, while recognizing Indigenous leaders who established the literal and metaphorical trails that we still follow today, these Awards serve as a powerful reminder of the dedication required across numerous disciplines to sustain our cultures and ways of life,” said Rick Hill, Vice President of the Niagara Academy for Indigenous Relations. “By honouring these exceptional people we affirm the enduring strength of Indigenous knowledge, creativity, leadership, and service, while inspiring future generations to carry these traditions forward.”

The evening opened with a Thanksgiving Address by **Karl Dockstader**, followed by remarks from Niagara College Vice President **Dr. Chris McGrath** and **Leah Hogan**, Director of Indigenous Education.

Interspersed throughout the program were musical performances by celebrated Indigenous artists, including **2nd Line Bluegrass**, **Joshua Arden Miller**, **James Wilson**, and **LyonsDen Rez Muzik (Brook Lyons)**. The 2026 Awards also marked a milestone in the program's growth — thanks to the generosity of **eleven sponsors** from diverse sectors.

Sponsors included: Barry and Laurie Green Family Trust (Title Sponsor); Niagara College and its Indigenous Education Unit (Venue Sponsor); James A. Burton & Family Foundation (Two-Row Alliance and Operational Sponsor); Meridian Credit Union (Financial Institution Sponsor); Brock University (Intellectual Advancement Sponsor); City of St. Catharines (Municipal Sponsor); Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (Language and Culture Sponsor); Six Nations House (Visual Arts Sponsor); Gail Lord and Lord Cultural Resources; Nancy J. Coombs; and Rick Hill.

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