

Evanston

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Ada Deer, Native Rights Pioneer, to Speak at Mitchell Museum Annual Lecture

Menominee elder Ada E. Deer, nationally recognized social worker, community organizer, activist, and political leader, will deliver the Mitchell Museum of the American Indian's first annual Dr. Carlos Montezuma Honorary Lecture on Wednesday, December 8, at 6:30PM.

Her talk, "A Path to Social Justice", will take place at Nichols Concert Hall of the Music Institute of Chicago, 1490 Chicago Ave., Evanston. Tickets are available at the event and are \$20 for adults and \$15 for students, teachers, tribal members, and Mitchell Museum members. For information, phone the museum at (847) 475-1030; www.mitchellmuseum.org.

Among her many accomplishments, Deer helped lead the successful fight to restore federal recognition to Wisconsin's Menominee Indian tribe, securing the tribe's sovereignty, land, and natural resources. Because of her work, Deer became the first woman to chair the Menominee Tribe in Wisconsin. She served as Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs, at the U.S. Department of the Interior during the Clinton administration -- the first Native woman to hold that position, which included supervision of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Mitchell Museum's Dr. Carlos Montezuma Honorary Lecture, to be presented each fall, is named for an early 20th-century Native American physician and civil rights crusader who lived and worked in Chicago.

"I'm very honored to initiate the series bearing his name," says Deer, who lives near Madison, Wis. She is Distinguished Lecturer, Emerita, at the School of Social Work at the University of Wisconsin. She was director of the university's American Indian Studies program from 2000 until her retirement. Deer hopes her talk will motivate listeners of all backgrounds to shake off complacency and seek out and tackle public issues close to their hearts.

"Pay your rent on the planet. Do something to help others, based on your knowledge and skills and your sense of obligations," she said in an interview with the Mitchell Museum. "If you haven't discovered your passion, get busy and find it. Tribes have survived because it's we, not me. The individual is secondary to the group."

Deer says the challenges facing Native communities today are much the same as in decades past: "preservation of land and resources, poverty and racism, upholding tribal sovereignty."

Like Dr. Montezuma (1866-1923), Deer has led an extraordinary life. She was born August 7, 1935, on Wisconsin's Menominee Indian Reservation to a white mother, who was a nurse with the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Menominee Indian father. The family lived in a one-room log cabin without electricity or running water. "My mother motivated and inspired me," Deer says. "She had a deep respect and reverence for Indian culture."

Deer was the first Menominee undergraduate to receive a degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and went on to become the first Native American to receive a Master of Social Work from Columbia University. Ada Deer is on the National Association of Social Workers Foundation's roster of "Social Work Pioneers".

She created the first program to provide social work training on reservations and co-founded the Indian Community School in Milwaukee. A former fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government's Institute of Politics at Harvard University, she has served on many local, state, and national committees, boards, and commissions.

The Wisconsin Historical Society celebrated her lifetime achievements at its History Makers Gala in 2007, and she received the Robert and Belle Case La Follette Award for Distinction in Public Service.