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## **National Museum of the American Indian Announces NMAI Prism Award Winners**

The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian will present the first-ever NMAI Prism Award to **Maria Hinton** (Oneida) and **Irving Nelson** (Navajo) during the museum's Anniversary Gala Reception held Oct. 7. The award is given to outstanding Native individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary and innovative approaches to public service in their local community.

Hinton, from Oneida, Wis., is being recognized as an educator and a pivotal person who has worked almost 40 years to preserve the Oneida language. A tribal elder at the age of 99, she is one of three remaining fluent speakers, and she still teaches occasionally at the Oneida Nation Elementary School that she helped found in the late 1970s. She and her brother, Amos Christjohn, have developed the definitive dictionary of the Oneida language, which has been digitized into a searchable online database that contains more than 34,000 words, including 900 sound files of pronunciation. Hinton was an original representative to the Wisconsin Native American Languages Project, which preserves the language and culture of the state's five Indian tribes. She has recorded Oneida stories collected from her memory and other tribal elders and has been active with the Oneida Language Revitalization Program.

Nelson, from Window Rock, Ariz., is the current director of the Navajo Nation Library System where he started as the bookmobile driver in 1978. His dedication to bringing accessible reading to the Navajo people is apparent in his efforts to amass and personally catalog more than 70,000 books in the collection. The libraries' special collection on Native American topics, featuring 11,000 books, also includes oral-history tapes and tribal land-claims records dating back to 1675. Through his outreach to obtain donated materials, Nelson has built a fulsome, balanced library and has driven across the

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country to collect books; he has also established a public-access computer lab. Groups that benefit include all 110 Navajo chapter houses, Boys and Girls Clubs, Head Start and detention centers. Under Nelson's direction, the entire card catalog and Navajo Times tribal newspaper has been fully digitized and archived.

"We were looking for those quiet heroes we all know from our hometowns who are good hearted and committed to the betterment of people's lives," said Kevin Gover (Pawnee), museum director. "These are individuals whose work goes largely unnoticed by the outside world but is so important to the people of the community. We could not have chosen more deserving recipients."

More than 35 nominations were submitted and the eight finalists were chosen by the executive committee of the museum's board of trustees.

The NMAI Prism Award was designed to reflect an important architectural feature in the museum's Potomac Atrium. Eight acrylic prisms are located in the south wall, and on sunlit days they emit a colorful spectrum that moves across the floor and walls of the space. Much like a prism that captures light and disperses it in many directions and colors, the winners of the award, through their selfless work, touch upon many people in a positive way. The base of the award is made from the original Kasota limestone used to clad the exterior of the museum, and the acrylic prism is engraved with a sun symbol and a short dedication.

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