



FOR RELEASE
December 2, 2011

Three Aboriginal employees honoured

WHITEHORSE—Three Government of Yukon employees received the 2011 Aboriginal Employees Award of Honour today at the year-end gathering of the Aboriginal Employees Forum.

The 2011 recipients are:

- Mida “Martha” Donnessey, Kaska language instructor at Watson Lake Secondary School;
- Richard Gordon, senior parks ranger at Herschel Island; and
- Melanie Bennett, acting principal at Takhini Elementary in Whitehorse.

Special recognition was given to Mollie Roy, a financial review and recovery analyst with the department of Health and Social Services in Whitehorse, for her ongoing support to the Aboriginal Employees Forum.

“The Aboriginal Employees Award of Honour recognizes the accomplishments of outstanding Aboriginal employees in the Yukon government,” Public Service Commission Minister Elaine Taylor said. “I’m honoured to present the awards to such deserving individuals. They are all outstanding employees, whose work makes Yukon better for First Nations and non-First Nations alike.”

The Aboriginal Employees Award of Honour was established in 2009 by the Aboriginal Employees Forum Steering Committee. The forum works towards fulfilling commitments in the Yukon government’s *Final Agreement–Representative Public Service Plan*, an obligation of Yukon First Nation Final Agreements.

There were 12 nominees from five different departments for the 2011 Aboriginal Employees Award of Honour.

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See backgrounder below.

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Backgrounder 2011 Aboriginal Employees Award of Honour Recipients

Mida “Martha” Donnessey

Mida Donnessey is a respected Kaska Elder. She has worked part-time as a Kaska language teacher at Watson Lake Secondary School since 1999 and has been an educator in her community for decades.

She is a role model and mentor to both teachers and students throughout the school, providing support and encouragement in many ways. She shares Kaska culture and language by modelling and demonstrating it in everything she does.

She takes part in all school activities and reminds students every day about the importance of recognizing and celebrating their Kaska heritage

Richard Gordon

Richard Gordon is the senior park ranger for Herschel Island Territorial Park and has been in that position for the past 11 years. During the operating season he works on the remote island along the Yukon North Slope. He also manages a year-round Yukon parks office in Inuvik.

Richard provides leadership as a mentor and trainer to employees who work as park rangers on the island, including several Inuvialuit employees. He has been praised for the high quality of service he provides to researchers, tourism operators and the visiting public. His nominators say he is instrumental in building relationships between the Yukon government and community and Aboriginal organizations through his engaging humour and traditional storytelling.

Melanie Bennett

Melanie Bennett has been a teacher and vice-principal at Takhini Elementary School and is now the acting principal. She has shown leadership that enhances the education of students and experience of teachers at her school, both First Nations and non-First Nations.

Melanie has completed leadership programs through the Yukon government and is in the final stages of a masters of education program in leadership.

She has worked to make First Nations culture a valued and significant part of school life at Takhini Elementary. She started a drumming and dancing program, a button blanket (sewing) club, a beading club and a carving program.

Melanie's nominators say that her work has made Takhini Elementary a model of First Nations cultural inclusion.

News Release #11-175



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