

*Dr. Karla Abbott, associate professor of nursing, and Dr. Mary Brendtro, professor emeritus of nursing, will now present the Western America Award.*

WESTERN AMERICA AWARD

**Marcella LeBeau**

Citation

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The WESTERN AMERICA AWARD is presented on those rare occasions when the Board of Directors of the Center for Western Studies wishes to honor an individual for extraordinary achievement. The most recent recipient was artist JoAnne Bird, in 2010. Today, we are humbled and honored to present the WESTERN AMERICA AWARD to healer and teacher **Dr. Marcella LeBeau**, recipient just last year of an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service from South Dakota State University.

Marcella has always represented her tribal people with courage, fortitude and grace. Born October 12, 1919, in Promise, South Dakota, Marcella LeBeau or Wigmuke Waste' Win (Pretty Rainbow Woman) is a direct descendant of Chief Four Bear, an enrolled member of the Two Kettle band of the Lakota tribe.

During her last year of training at St. Mary's School of Nursing in Pierre, SD, in 1942, Marcella and another nursing colleague responded out of a deep love of country to the call for nurses overseas during the World War II conflict. While stationed in Liège, Belgium, Marcella assisted in the surgical tents, interrupted by bombs from planes overhead. One day Marcella was called to the bedside of a Lakota serviceman who had lost the will to live after bilateral leg amputation. Marcella immediately sat with Sgt. Robideaux and convinced him that he had much to live for and that his efforts would bring honor to the Lakota people. Her valiant nursing efforts earned her the European African Middle East Theatre Campaign Medal; the Northern France Battle Star; The Rhineland Battle Star; The Ardennes Battle Star; and WWII Victory Medal. In 2004, Marcella traveled to France to receive the French Legion Medal of Honor.

Upon returning home from her Army Nurse Corps service, Marcella married Gilbert LeBeau, and while raising eight children, continued her nursing career for 31 years, serving the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe through the Indian Health

Service. A staff nurse, Ophelia Swan Breisch, Karla Abbott's mother, stated that Marcella was extremely committed to her work:

"One time we were all working hard in the emergency room trying to save the lives of three car accident victims. The transport airplane flew low over the hospital to alert us to meet them with the patients at the airstrip. We were wondering how we could get these patients cared for and two of them to the airplane a mile away. All of a sudden, Marcella's arms were there beside me helping me to dress the wounds of one of the patients. I thought to myself, 'she has a family to care for and her shift ended three hours ago' but Marcella came back to the hospital when she heard the airplane."

Marcella believed that a strong involvement in the tribal health policies of Native American people was very important. She was elected to and served on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council from 1991-1995. During that time, she vehemently challenged the council members and the tribal chairman to implement a new health policy for the Tribal Council chambers, going so far as to don an air filtration mask and sitting gracefully for eight hours a day, further demonstrating the harmful effects of smoking. Her diligence in educating tribal community members was instrumental in passage of a "no-smoking" rule in Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council Chambers in 1992.

An example of her quiet strength and dedication to the mental health of all Native American people is Marcella's participation in the return of a Ghost Dance shirt from a museum in Scotland in 1999. Traveling to the City of Glasgow to testify and then bringing the Ghost Dance shirt to its final resting place in South Dakota was a great accomplishment for Marcella. Recently, she related that adventure for us here at the Dakota Conference.

Further treasuring her heritage, Marcella became the founding member of a chapter of North American Indian Women's Association (NIAWA) of South Dakota. Marcella is still an active member of that organization, which promotes professionalism of Native American women.

Expanding on reconciliation and the improved mental health of the Lakota people, Marcella partnered with Dr. Paul Carpenter, a cardiologist in Sioux

Falls, to honor the Fool Soldiers who rescued the Lake Shetek captives of 1862 and returned them to their families. Marcella, a descendent of Fool Soldier Four Bear was excited to work with Dr. Carpenter, a descendent of one of the Lake Shetek captives. Marcella organized a reunion and healing ceremony among all descendants, and her efforts culminated in a scholarship fund for Fool Soldier descendants.

From 2008-2016, Marcella served on the research advisory board of the SDSU and South Dakota Lions Eye Bank Organ and Tissue donation projects, spearheaded by Dr. Nancy Fahrenwald. Marcella's was a strong voice for the elders in the Native American tribes in South Dakota who initially did not support organ and tissue donation. Marcella could see that the Native Americans should adapt their beliefs to incorporate the many Native Americans who need organ and tissue donations.

Marcella is a staunch believer in personal health and well-being, having hiked Bear Butte on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. She currently walks on the treadmill or rides a stationary bike at the tribal health center daily. A dedicated veteran, Marcella walks one mile yearly in the Annual Fair and Labor Day parade in Eagle Butte.

Reflecting on her life, Marcella states that her career in nursing has provided her much honor and experience. A mentor of nursing and respected Lakota elder of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Marcella LeBeau's life achievements embody scientific knowledge, grace, and fortitude. Please join with us as we acknowledge the Lifetime Achievement of Dr. Marcella LeBeau with the WESTERN AMERICA AWARD!