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University Relations

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**Paulette Fairbanks Molin is recipient of UMM Distinguished Alumni Award**

*Summary:*

(November 7, 2005)-by Judy Korn '95, University Relations -- Paulette Fairbanks Molin '66 has received a 2005 University of Minnesota, Morris Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Award. The honor recognizes alumni who have made noteworthy contributions in their professional lives, in public service, or in service to the University of Minnesota. Professor of History Wilbert Ahern nominated Molin for the award. He praised the noted educator and author's professional and civic accomplishments, especially noting Molin's "path-breaking" study of stereotypes with which Indian children must deal. He also stated: "As a charter member of the National Caucus of the Woodcraft Circle, Molin, a member of the Chippewa Tribe from the White Earth Reservation, has helped create a supportive climate for other native authors."

During her recent visit to campus, Molin spoke to students in Assistant Professor of Anthropology Julie Pelletier's Native American Ethnography class and Assistant Professor of English Becca Gercken-Hawkins' Native American Literature class and Tricksters-Conjurers in Native American and African American Literature class. She shared comments informally during a reception hosted by the Multi-Ethnic Student Program at UMM, and also addressed alumni, students, faculty, and staff during the October UMM Alumni Association Banquet and Annual Meeting.

During her remarks, Molin shared that her grandmother was a student at the American Indian boarding school on the Morris campus in the early 1900s. When Molin arrived in the early 1960s, having never visited the UMM campus before enrolling, she immediately recognized landmarks described by her grandmother. Those memories provided an unusual connection to a place where she first felt like "an imposter," and sometimes out-of-place. "People like me didn't go to college," shared Molin. "I feared I'd flunk out."

But the young women who came sight unseen to freshmen orientation did well, academically and socially. "I was exposed to new and different ideas," remembered Molin. "UMM opened entire worlds to me."

Molin graduated from UMM in 1966, receiving a bachelor of arts in French and English. She continued her education at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, where she earned a master of fine arts in 1975 and a doctorate in 1987, both in educational administration. Her dedicated career in education included serving as director of an American Indian elementary curriculum project for the Minneapolis Public Schools and as assistant dean of the graduate college and director of the American Indian Educational Opportunity Program at Hampton University in Virginia.

Noting that her UMM education laid a solid foundation for her future, Molin expressed her approval of opportunities afforded today's students: "It is just amazing and a great tribute to those working here that they are developing an American Indian major. It is gratifying to see the great strides UMM has made in American Indian education." She also noted that she is pleased that UMM offers Dakota and Anishinaabe language courses.

Molin is co-editor of American Indian Stereotypes in the World of Children, co-author of Encyclopedia of Native

American Religions, and the author of numerous articles, poems and stories. Molin has served as curator for several major exhibitions including Enduring Legacy: Native Peoples, Native Arts at Hampton and To Lead and To Serve: American Indian Education at Hampton Institute, 1878-1923, a traveling photographic exhibition which has been presented at numerous sites across the United States including Harvard University.

Molin was one of two recipients receiving the Distinguished Alumni Award for 2005. Also honored was Cy Thao '95, artist and member of the Minnesota State House of Representatives. Molin and Thao were presented their awards by Carol Eckersen '80, chair of the awards committee and Alumni Association past president, during the Alumni Association Banquet and Annual Meeting held on October 21, 2005.

Molin and her husband, Larry, make their home in Hampton, Virginia, where she continues to conduct research and write.

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