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Isaiah Brokenleg receives Volunteer Service Award

Summary:

(February 1, 2005)-Isaiah Brokenleg doesn't keep track of the number of hours he has spent volunteering in the past year. He just knows that he has a responsibility to help out his "relatives.\\\"

A senior at the University of Minnesota, Morris, originally from Rosebud, S.D., Brokenleg is the recipient of the President's Volunteer Service Award. To his knowledge, he is the first UMM person to receive the award.

Even that doesn't especially matter to Brokenleg.

Of Lakota descent, Brokenleg has a personal philosophy on the importance of community service:

"In the Lakota language there is a phrase, 'Mitakuye Oyasin.' " It means 'all my relatives,\' " said Brokenleg. "In this case "relatives" includes all humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

\\\"We believe everything is connected. I see community service as something I do to help my relatives as well as something I do to succeed," said Brokenleg

In his 2002 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush issued a challenge to all Americans to make time to help their neighbors, communities, and nation through service. In 2003, he created the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation to find ways to recognize the valuable contributions volunteers are making in our Nation. The President's Council on Service and Civic Participation created the President's Volunteer Service Award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service.

For the record, the number of volunteer service hours Brokenleg estimates he completed for the 2003-2004 academic year was 204, a number he was asked to provide for those who nominated him for the award. A rundown of just a few of his activities includes:

- Student organizer for student support of AFSCME Strike
- Community Outreach and Organizing with farm workers in rural Minnesota

Provided resource materials, human rights work, social justice, and consultation with regard to discrimination and oppression. Procured translation services. Served as a liaison between the Latino community, communities of color, and the larger Morris community.

- Workshop/Training Service Project with Heartland Girls' Ranch, Benson

Among other achievements, Brokenleg has served as an Ambassador for Cultural Exchange in local third grade

classrooms, sharing his Lakota culture by reading to the class and sharing his native foods. He has traveled to Africa with the American Friends Service (AFS) Committee to attend the United Nations World Conference Against Racism.

Brokenleg still manages to attend UMM as full-time student. He will graduate this spring with two self-designed majors— one in multicultural studies and a second in applied social justice and human rights. His other interests include photography, dancing, camping and travel. He is applying to graduate schools and aspires to complete his education in social work, public health or divinity.

“I see myself as a healer of people and of societies or communities,” said Brokenleg. “I’ll continue to do the work that needs to be done.”

What does the award mean to Brokenleg?

Although appreciative of the recognition that the award brings, said Brokenleg, “It’s not that important to be honored. It is significant because it tells me that I’ve made a difference.”

“Everyone’s version of success is slightly different,” said Brokenleg. “For some, success is about how much money you can make, how big your house is, or how many cars you own. For me, success is knowing that I make a difference in the lives of others and create positive change within society.”

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