

2021 Heritage Award Recipient – Darlene Peters

The Heritage Award honors those who have made contributions to preserving, interpreting and promoting Skagit County's unique cultural history. Darlene Peters was one of the people who shared her cultural narrative through her love of education, building strong communities and dedication to strong mental health practices.

Darlene attended and graduated from La Conner High School, Skagit Valley College with an A.A. degree in Early Childhood Education; Saint Martin's University earning a B.A. in Community Service and Seattle University achieving a M.A. in Relationship and Pastoral Therapy. As Darlene achieved her own educational goals, she encouraged and supported others to achieve their goals while working at Skagit Valley College, ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program), the La Conner School District, the Swinomish and Tulalip Tribes, and Native Health while living in Arizona. Her educational achievements and dedicated career reflected what she learned from her community.

Growing up on the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Darlene learned the values and cultural history that the tribe embraced: striving for healthy families and homes, high-quality education for children and loving care for the elders, while preserving Swinomish traditions and culture for generations to come. She led by example, participating in leadership roles that highlighted and celebrated the Swinomish culture and heritage. This was evident early on as she served as class president during eighth and twelfth grades, later running for a tribal senate seat, serving on tribal committees and participating in celebratory events. She was enthusiastic and fun-loving as she modeled and mentored others in tribal practices.

Darlene knew that an education would open doors and create a better life for her community members. Supporting others to achieve their goals by facing personal challenges, she often shared her tribal history and culture. Darlene knew that by sharing her own journey, she might provide encouragement and healing for others. She did this one-on-one with her students and clients, including others in a Friendship Dance, drumming and singing at local events; she freely shared her perspective and experiences with those around her. Darlene lived her Swinomish Culture and History with those around her. I am fortunate to have been one of the many that she shared this rich path.

Unfortunately, Darlene passed away on December 17, 2020 due to complications from Covid-19.