

# IN MEMORIAM

**William Demmert, Jr.**  
**March 9, 1934 - January 19, 2010**

William Demmert, Jr. passed away January 19, 2010. Of Tlingit and Oglala Lakota (Sioux) heritage, he rose to prominence in the early 1970s while attending Harvard University when he assisted Senator Edward Kennedy with drafting the 1972 Indian Education Act (IEA), gaining tribal input and support for the legislation. Dr. Demmert attended the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars at Princeton in March 1970, where he participated with others in a discussion that led to the establishment of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) in August of that year. He served as treasurer on the first NIEA board and designed the organization's logo. He was called upon to implement the IEA at the U.S. Office of Education and was appointed Deputy Commissioner of Education, followed by an appointment as Director of the Office of Indian Education Programs, until he left government service in 1978.

Throughout his distinguished career Dr. Demmert sought ways to expand the reach of the IEA and its core principles concerning the role and positive influence of Native languages and cultures in the education of American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Indigenous peoples of the circumpolar north. He held many professional positions, including professor of education at Western Washington University and a number of other universities, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Alaska Southeast, and Alaska State Commissioner of Education. He also served as chair and member of numerous task forces and commissions, including the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force.

Dr. Demmert was a member of the Clinton-Gore Council of Education Advisors and their President-elect Transition Team. He was involved, along with others, as an advisor on the drafting and implementation of President Clinton's Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education (EO 13096). At the time he passed away, he was part of a research partnership that included five Native language immersion schools to demonstrate the positive impact of culturally based education on the academic achievement of Native American students.

In all his education policy and research efforts, Dr. Demmert uniquely combined a passion for his tribal heritage and experience growing up under the tutelage of his Tlingit father and uncles, who taught him fishing and the Alaska seas, with a passion for research and scholarship related to culturally based education. His memories of attending nearly every type of school available to Alaska Natives at the time - territorial, state, and Bureau of Indian Affairs - guided his work as a teacher and administrator at many schools in Washington State and Alaska, including his home community of Klawock, Alaska. Universally respected by legislators and policy advocates as an expert in Indigenous education policy, William Demmert was equally respected among Native peoples for his ability to seek their input, listen, and incorporate the essence of Native American opinion and thought about the education of Native American students into policy recommendations.

— David Beaulieu, Ph.D.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
June 24, 2010

# IN MEMORIAM

**Gerald V. Mohatt**  
**September 1940 - February 10, 2010**

Described by many as a gifted teacher, model administrator, innovator, and visionary who was passionate about his family and his work, Gerald “Jerry” Mohatt, 69, director of the Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, passed away peacefully February 10, 2010. He was 69.

A professor of psychology, Dr. Mohatt earned his doctorate in community clinical psychology and learning environments from Harvard University in 1978, and a master's degree in psychology from St. Louis University. He was trilingual, speaking English, Lakota, and French. Before coming to UAF in 1983, he was the founding president of one of the first tribal colleges, Sinte Gleska Tribal College, now Sinte Gleska University on the Rosebud Lakota Reservation.

In 1983, he assumed the position of Dean of a newly formed College of Human and Rural Development at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He served in this role for nine years, successfully fostering a strong Indigenous focus in the education, psychology, and sociology programs. He also planted the seeds for the doctoral program in clinical community psychology that, under his continuing leadership, would come to fruition two decades later.

In 2003, he became the founding director of the Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR) at UAF. In this capacity, he was responsible for assembling a group of high-quality faculty and staff with research focused on obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease among Alaska Native peoples. He also trained and mentored graduate students, pushing them to work hard but find the passion in their work and realize its value to the communities they worked in. He was a strict teacher and mentor, but was optimistic about everything he did and believed in.

Dr. Mohatt received numerous awards, including the Society for Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues Lifetime Achievement Award in Research from Division 45 of the American Psychological Association. His many other honors include the American Book Award for *Transforming the Culture of Schools: Yup'ik Eskimo Examples* (with Jerry Lipka and the Ciulistet Group), 1999; the Victor E. Howery Award for Contributions to Rural Mental Health, National Rural Mental Health Association, 2004; the Distinguished Career Contributions in Research Award presented by American Psychological Association Division 45, Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues, August, 2007; and the Usibelli Award for Excellence in Research, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2008. He will be honored posthumously in January 2011 with the National Multicultural Conference and Summit Distinguished Elder Award.

In addition to teaching graduate and under-graduate courses, among his many contributions to the Alaska university system was developing the College of Rural Alaska, turning it from paper and pencil and surface mail to an electronic program. He was a pioneer in distance education and largely responsible for its effectiveness. He leaves a legacy at the CANHR, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and Alaska statewide, and likewise leaves an unforgettable mark on so many people he helped and trained — young faculty and graduate students. Native American peoples lost a great ally, friend, and mentor in February, 2010.

— Jordan Lewis, Ph.D.  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
June 29, 2010