

2007 Buffett Award for Indigenous Leadership Awardee: Roberta Conner

*“Culture brings us together. Culture reflects our values.
It’s what we hold closest to our hearts and cling to in times of need.”*
Roberta Conner

Roberta Conner is the honored recipient of the 2007 Buffett Award for Indigenous Leadership for her work representing the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) as a community and national leader, museum director, curator, speaker and author. She is an enrolled member of the CTUIR and her ancestry is Umatilla, Cayuse and Nez Perce. Conner currently resides in Pendleton, Oregon.

Since 1998, Conner has served as the Director of the Tamástsiłkt Cultural Institute, which preserves, protects and promotes the culture of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla. This facility houses an interpretive center, library, photo archive, gallery and theater. Conner assisted with curation of the *Many Nations Many Voices* exhibit. From 2003 to 2006, the exhibit appeared at numerous venues including the University of Virginia, American Academy of Sciences, Denver Museum of Natural Sciences, and the Oregon Historical Society.

Conner is a well-published writer and lecturer on cultural preservation issues. Her idea to hold convocations of tribal elders, tribal and non-Indian scholars and tribal students resulted in a new tribal history book and the development of a Sahaptian language place names atlas that is due out in 2008. Conner also mentors young scholars who are interested in tribal cultural preservation by developing opportunities for them to work with well-known historians and authors on Tamástsiłkt projects.

Conner currently serves on the board of the Willowa Homeland Project and the Oregon Cultural Trust as a special advisor for tribal issues. She also served as Vice-President of the National Council of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Board of Directors. She has previously served on numerous Boards and committees including the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission (2000 to 2004); Oregon Council for the Humanities Board (2000 to 2001) and the Governors Task Force for Cultural Development, Oregon (2000 to 2001).

From 1977 to 1982, Conner provided technical assistance to Indian education grantees in the Pacific Northwest for the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation in Seattle. She worked for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) from 1984 to 1997 in Denver and Sacramento as a Presidential Management Intern, Branch Manager and District Director.

In 1997, Conner came home and served as Tamástsiłkt’s Chief Operating Officer. In this role, she also served as a liaison to the Oregon Native American Business and Entrepreneurial Network, Crow’s Shadow Art Institute and the Willowa Band Nez Perce Trail Interpretive Center. Conner also worked to set-up a business service center.

Conner attended the University of Oregon’s School of Journalism and received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1977. She also received a Master of Management in 1984 from the Atkinson Graduate School at Willamette University.