

Native teens honoured as role models

Nellie Carlson Youth Awards salute five 'unsung heroes'

KATHY WALKER
Journal Staff Writer
EDMONTON

Eagles and medicine wheels figure prominently in his art, and the strength and well-being they represent guide his life.

"My artwork gives me more confidence, and makes my life more positive," says Nathan Cardinal, 19, whose work will soon hang in the Edmonton Art Gallery. Cardinal and three other aboriginal teenagers won Nellie Carlson Youth Awards for being positive role models.

The fifth annual awards were presented Tuesday at City Hall by the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee.

Chairman Lewis Cardinal called the recipients unsung heroes who have had to deal with a historical legacy of injustice and racism. "Our society, as open as it is now, did not hold native people in high regard for a long time," he said.

Nellie Carlson, for whom the youth awards were renamed this year, has spent decades advocating for native women and youth.

The 75-year-old Cree elder helped establish the "Awasis" and "Sacred Circle" programs for native children, and successfully lobbied the federal government to replace discriminatory legislation that stripped native women of their treaty rights.

Carlson recalled eating "bread bags full of bologna sandwiches" and sleeping on many floors while lobbying in Ottawa. She urged the audience to volunteer time to work for social justice.

"She's a living legend," said



Elder Nellie Carlson sits with Nellie Carlson Youth Award winners, left to right: Nathan Cardinal, April Thomas, Tania Char and Tyrone Contois.

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Cardinal. "I've never seen such a powerful little lady move so many people in one room."

Award recipient April Thomas, 16, seems to have taken Carlson's words to heart. After growing up in a family deeply affected by

alcoholism, she chooses not to drink and counsels others to follow her example. Thomas is captain and a founding member of the Colts cheerleading squad at L.Y. Cairns school.

Tyrone Contois, 15, a Grade 8

honour student at Parkdale school, won an award for his dedication to community leadership and athletic excellence.

Tania Char, 15, won the Best Sportsmanship award. She is a member of the basketball team at

Parkdale school and also volunteers with a native peer group.

The awards were a kickoff to events this week leading up to National Aboriginal Day on Saturday.

kwalker@thejournal.canwest.com