NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT:
Francesca Pine-Rodriguez
406-577-6244
fpine@spiritaligned.org

SPIRIT ALIGNED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM WELCOMES NEW LEGACY LEADERS
Eight Remarkable Indigenous Women Elders Welcomed Into Three-Year Fellowship

Akwesasne, New York (April 15, 2019) – The Spirit Aligned Leadership Program is pleased to announce the selection of its second circle of Legacy Leaders. Eight more extraordinary Indigenous women elders have joined Spirit Aligned for a three-year, co-creative fellowship to strengthen their sisterhood and share their life teachings in self-determined legacy plans.

“We are honored and excited to welcome these eight remarkable women to Spirit Aligned,” notes Director Katsi Cook. “Individually and collectively, they embody Indigenous sisterhood and connection to ancestral ways that open paths to healing for our global world. Each has achieved an appreciation for a meaningful life.”

The uplifted elders are a culturally and geographically diverse group, each woman a leader in the revitalization of her Indigenous language and ancestral ways.

• Maxine Wildcat Barnett of Sapulpa, Oklahoma, is the last fluent speaker of her Yuchi language. At 93, she is bridging the gap between her generation of first-language speakers and the young children she teaches. They are learning to speak Yuchi, and are proud of their unique
Jennie Seminole Parker is a Northern Cheyenne from the Tongue River area of Montana. She shares the words of her father, Big Spider: “You will never know fear until you have been chased like an animal,” with the young Cheyennes who take part in the annual Fort Robinson Memorial Run. In January 2019, Jennie was the final runner of the epic 400-mile relay. She returned the Cheyenne flag to its homeland, symbolizing the completion of a journey home that many of their relatives, under assault by United States military forces, did not survive in 1879.

Diane Brown of Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, grew up among her elders, speaking the Haida language and learning the teachings of her ancestors. Diane and her community members have stopped the grave robbing of their ancestors and the irresponsible logging of ancestral lands. Her dedication to Haida language revitalization has resulted in the creation of successful learning programs. She continues to provide wisdom for the world’s challenges.

Cherokee root doctor Onita Bush carries a wealth of traditional and ancestral knowledge and is a medicine woman for her community of Mountain Creek, North Carolina. Her knowledge sheds light on how Indigenous and Western practices can complement each other in a non-hierarchal way. Onita has been utilizing traditional ecological knowledge before Western science had a name for it.

Sharon Day is an Ojibwe water walker, leading women in ceremony to offer healing and raise awareness about water issues around the country. She cares for the Saint Paul, Minnesota indigenous community through her work as executive director of Indigenous Peoples Task Force.

Kathleen Sanchez is a spirit-rooted social justice activist and co-founder of Tewa Women United. This year she and the organization, which supports Indigenous women, families and beloved communities, celebrates its 30th anniversary.

Faith Spotted Eagle, Ihanktonwan Dakota, is a matriarch of the Brave Heart Society, which has revived a sacred coming-of-age ceremony for teen girls. Faith’s childhood community was completely flooded by the US Army Corp of Engineers, influencing her lifelong commitment to activism and protecting the sacred.

Thelma Whiskers, deeply grounded in Ute culture and speaker of two Indigenous languages, co-founded White Mesa Concerned Community to protect her Ute homelands from uranium poisoning. As a cradleboard maker for newborn babies, she gathered her native...
materials on lands that are now contaminated. Thelma organizes and testifies in various justice forums urging people to take action for a nuclear-free future.

Spirit Aligned honors these Indigenous women elders and the ancestral knowledge they have courageously nurtured over their lives. Individually, they each work to heal, strengthen and restore balance within their Indigenous communities. Together, they are empowered to create a collective impact across Indigenous cultural expression and education, leadership of Indigenous women and girls, violence against girls, women and the earth, and healing from trauma and oppression.

These Legacy Leaders were carefully chosen from hundreds of applicants from throughout the United States and Canada. The confidential review and selections process considered cultural diversity, geographic distribution, peer references, as well as reflections about their own knowledge and wisdom journey.

About Spirit Aligned Leadership Program

Created in thoughtful partnership with NoVo Foundation, the Spirit Aligned Leadership Program elevates the lives, voices and dreams of Indigenous women elders who are working to heal, strengthen and restore the balance of Indigenous communities. For more information, visit www.spiritaligned.org and find us on Facebook.

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