

# AWARDS



## CARL A. KULCZYK MEMORIAL AWARD

### Frank LaMere

**Board Member, Siouxland Community Health Center**

On June 16 of this year, Frank LaMere, a nationally-recognized peace and justice activist, and a board member of Siouxland Community Health Center, died after a brief battle with liver duct cancer. He was 69 years old.

Frank's death prompted an outpouring of tributes from state and nationally elected officials and community leaders throughout the country – a testimony to the powerful impact he made on individual friends and colleagues, his community and the Native nation. Frank was a member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, and the son of a Gold Star mother and a combat veteran father. His activism dated back to the 1970's, serving as a member of the American Indian Movement and demanding reform of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In the following decades, Frank became a well-known advocate for the rights of Native Americans. He was instrumental in initiating the Memorial March to Honor Lost Children, a march raising awareness of the child welfare system and the Native American Community. He worked with local law enforcement and community leaders to eliminate homelessness, addiction, and mental illness, and was named an Honorary Police Chief by the Sioux City Police in 2018. Frank attained national prominence for his decades-long efforts to close beer stores in White Clay, Nebraska, that were blamed for alcohol-related issues on the nearby Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. His efforts culminated with the closure of the stores by regulators in 2017.

Frank's activism extended well beyond the Native Community, as he battled for the rights of all people through the political system. He was the longest serving Native member of the Democratic National Committee, the Chair of the National Native Caucus of the Democratic Party, and a delegate to the Democratic National Convention seven times. In 2019, Frank received an honorary law degree from Nebraska Wesleyan University for his advocacy work in human and civil rights.

Frank's activism was equaled only by his deep spirituality, which was demonstrated by his compassion and care for others. He began every meeting with a prayer, listened to others more than he spoke, and challenged issues not with force but with dignified gentleness. As Nebraska Democratic State Chairwoman Jane Kleeb wrote, "Frank taught us all to be stronger leaders with big hearts."

Frank is survived by his wife Cynthia. He had four children; Jennifer, Hazen, Manape Hocinci-ga and Lexie Wakan, who died of leukemia in 2014 at the age of 21.

Frank's legacy will continue at the Siouxland Community Health Center and throughout the Siouxland and Native American communities.

#### **From the nomination statement:**

*As a health center board member and chair of the Board Development Committee, Frank devoted his efforts to transforming the board into a culturally diverse board that courageously tackled healthcare and public policy issues confronting our patients. His efforts in the last months of his life were focused on tackling the issues of mental illness, addiction, and homelessness in the Siouxland community both at the health center and in the larger community, raising money for a half-way house for homeless people graduating from treatment.*

*While Frank was an activist, he loved people and always sought to find the good in everyone, especially those whose ideas differed from his. His approach was always to thoughtfully listen to opposing views and to seek common ground. But to his core, Frank was a fighter who fought for equality for all people. As he always reminded us at health center board meetings, "If we're not uncomfortable tonight, we're not doing our job." Our health center board repeats Frank's message each board meeting and his legacy lives on in our health center and the broader community.*