

Chief Standing Bear Prize for Courage

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For Immediate Release

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Chief Standing Bear Courage Prize Committee Announces Nebraska State Senator Tom Brewer as 2023 Prize Recipient

Dateline: August 23, 2023 Lincoln, Nebraska — The Chief Standing Bear Prize for Courage Project announces the selection of Nebraska State Senator Tom Brewer as its 2023 Chief Standing Bear Prize for Courage recipient.

The Chief Standing Bear Project, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, was created in 2022 to promote the life and civil rights legacy of Ponca Chief Standing Bear by presenting public discussion groups, forums, lectures and other event on a national level. The initial kick-off program of the Project is the presentation of the Standing Bear Prize for Courage, awarded to those Native Americans who exemplify courage in the spirit of Standing Bear in doing what is right, rather than what is expedient.

Katie Brossy, board president of the Chief Standing Bear Project a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation stated that Senator Brewer was selected for the prize based on his long military and political career. Brewer served multiple tours of duty in Afghanistan where he was twice wounded and subsequently awarded two Purple Hearts. He played a key role in rescue efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, where he was responsible for the rescue of a total of 604 survivors. Most recently Brewer has participated in three humanitarian relief missions to the Ukraine, often at great peril to himself, coming under enemy fire on numerous occasions.

Brewer, an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux was elected to the Nebraska State Legislature in 2016 as the first ever Native American elected to the body. While Senator, he made addressing the tragedy in Whiteclay, Nebraska a top priority despite resistance from many in his district. He was instrumental in passing legislation recognizing Indigenous Peoples Day in Nebraska. During his tenure in office, he introduced legislation that gained bi-partisan support to honor Chief Standing Bear in Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C. as well as the renaming of the Chief Standing Bear Justice Administration Building in Lincoln, Nebraska.

As the recipient of the prize, Senator Brewer will be presented with his award at an event held at the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln, Nebraska on Indigenous Peoples Day, Monday, October 9, 2023. He will receive a statuette of Chief Standing Bear created by renowned artist Benjamin Victor, the sculptor of the iconic Statuary Hall Chief Standing Bear sculpture, as well as a cash honorarium.

More information about the prize and the award event will be released shortly and will be posted at www.chiefstandingbear.org

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Senator Tom Brewer Biography



State Senator Tom Brewer grew up near the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in western Nebraska. After graduating from Gordon high school, Brewer enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard on December 27, 1977.

Tom majored in Eastern European History and Management at Doane University. During his college years, he began his military career and continued to foster his leadership skills, receiving his commission as a 2Lt through ROTC in the U. S. Army. Tom also ran track and cross country completing 39 marathons. He graduated from Doane College in 1984.

Tom's military education included attendance at the U. S. Army Field Artillery School, Air Assault School, and Airborne School, being commissioned in 1983 as an Infantry Officer. He then attended Infantry Officer Basic Course, Pathfinder Course, Jump Master Course, and was a graduate of the Army Ranger School. Tom continued his education throughout his career, graduating from the Army Combined Arms Staff Services School, the Command and General Staff College, the Army War College, Czech Army Airborne School (in 2000), and the German Airborne School (in2002).

In 1996, Brewer helped coach the US Men's shooting team during training for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. He has been a team member and has coached the All Guard and All Army shooting teams to both National and World championships. He has personally won 10 National Championships and won the World Sniper championship in 1997. In 1999, Tom was selected as the Director of the Marksmanship Training Center at Little Rock, AR. Tom is double-distinguished in both rifle and pistol, and has earned the President's 100 tab. In 2019 Tom was a member of a 2 man team that won the World 3 gun championship in Bulgaria.

Tom showed leadership on the battlefield time and again. In 1985, Tom was assigned to the 1st SQDN 167th CAV as an Attack Helicopter pilot and attended the Army Rotary Wing Aviation Course, where he became qualified as an AH-1 Cobra, UH-1Huey and OH-58 Kiowa helicopter pilot. In 1990, Tom was mobilized for Operation Desert Storm and was assigned to 4th Brigade 1st CAV Division as S-3 Air.

Tom was mobilized in May of 2003 and was sent to Afghanistan to take Command of the Training Battalion of the Afghan National Army (ANA). His job there was to build the new Afghan National Army and to conduct combat operations with the Afghan National Army. Tom served with both the 10th Mountain Division and the 3rd Special Forces Group while in Afghanistan. On 12 October 2003, then LTC Brewer was shot six times in an ambush near Kabul, Afghanistan. As a result of that action, he was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.

In December 2003, Tom volunteered to stay in Afghanistan and serve with the combined Joint Special Operations Task Force to work on the senior staff.

Tom was selected to Command the first Task Force to arrive in New Orleans in response to Hurricane Katrina in Aug 2005. His Task Force rescued 604 individuals during 30 days of operation in the city of New Orleans.

In June 2006, Tom was selected for the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) Army War College Fellowship. While assigned to the DEA HQ, he served as the Military Advisor to the DEA Foreign Advisory and Support Team (FAST) in Afghanistan. In June 2007, Tom was then selected to Command the CENTCOM Counter Narcotics Task Force that trained the Kyrgyzstan Drug Control Authority to stop the trafficking of drugs through Central Asia.

In November 2007, Tom was assigned as the Operations Officer for the National Airborne Operations Center (NAOC) at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, NE. The National Airborne Operations Center is on board a Boeing 747 that supports the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States.

In January 2010, Tom was assigned as an Afghan Ministry of Interior (MOI) Advisor for US CENTCOM Counter Narcotics mission in Afghanistan. His responsibilities were to reduce and/or eliminate the trafficking and production of drugs in Afghanistan. During this tour of duty, on 16 December 2011, Tom was severely wounded when the vehicle he was traveling in was attacked by a rocket-propelled grenade. He was awarded both the purple heart and the Secretary of Defense medal of Freedom for his actions on 16 December 2011. Tom worked toward rehabilitation with every intention of returning to active duty to return to Afghanistan to see his mission to the end. Due to medical complications, COL Brewer was forced into military retirement after 36 years of decorated military service.

Tom is extremely proud of his family and their service to our country. Tom has been married for 34 years to his wife, Chief Warrant Officer 3 (retired) Kelli Brewer. The couple has 2 children: son Travis, 27 who currently serves in the Nebraska Guard National Guard's 67th BFSB, and teaches math for Elmwood/Murdock school; and daughter Kalee, 29 is a CPT assigned to the 195th support company of the Nebraska National Guard.

COL Brewer was elected in 2016 to the Nebraska unicameral legislature and is the first Native American to serve in the Nebraska Legislature and was re-elected in 2020. He represents the 43rd legislative district of western Nebraska. In 2019 he was elected chairman of the Government Military and Veterans affairs committee. In 2020 Tom organized a five senator team from Nebraska that successfully climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa.

Senator Brewer has completed three missions to Ukraine since the war has started with Russia in an effort to provide humanitarian relief, electronic bibles, radios and medical supplies to assist Ukrainians in their struggle for freedom.

Tom currently resides in Gordon, Nebraska.