

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Shuswap Nation Tribal Council
July 2nd, 2009

ADVOCATE OF SECWEPEMC LANGUAGE & EDUCATION DEPARTED

It is with great sadness that the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council announces the passing of Joe Michel of Adams Lake Indian Band, born December 3rd, 1929.

Having recently celebrated his 57th wedding anniversary with his wife Anne, Joe is also survived by his nine children, seven of which have successfully completed their own master's degrees, along with numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Mr. Michel, one of the first high school graduates of the Kamloops Residential School in 1950, was also one of the first aboriginal people to receive their certification in teaching with a Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia (UBC) in 1970. He taught for many years and contributed to several education boards and committees most notably as a board member of the National Indian Brotherhood and as a founding member of the Native Teacher Education Program (NITEP) of UBC.

In 2007, Mr. Michel was honored as a recipient of the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards in the field of education.

Mr. Michel was a great advocate for Secwepemc language and education, and contributed in many ways to the Secwepemc language curriculum throughout B.C. as both a teacher and mentor.

However, his most outstanding contribution to the Secwepemc people was likely his role in the establishment and success of the Chief Atahm School, the first aboriginal language immersion school of its kind in B.C.

"We have to relearn how to learn with both feet firmly planted in both worlds," Mr. Michel once said with regards to his dedication to the reconciliation of western education with traditional aboriginal values.

"Elder Joe Michel showed us all that achieving dreams is possible," says Chief Nelson Leon of Adams Lake. "That the contribution of one man could have such a profound affect in the salvation of a language from extinction and his un-selfish commitment to his people makes him an inspiration to us all."

"On behalf of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, I would like to extend my deepest condolences to the family of Mr. Michel," adds Chief Wayne Christian, tribal spokesperson. "Today we have suffered a great loss."

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