

Cherokee Museum wins Mountain Heritage Award

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CULLOWHEE - The Museum of the Cherokee Indian, an institution that tells the world how the Cherokee people have lived, endured and survived, is the 1998 recipient of WCU's Mountain Heritage Award.

Western Carolina University Chancellor John W. Bardo presented the award Saturday to museum director Ken Blankenship at WCU's 24th annual Mountain Heritage Day.

The Museum of the Cherokee Indian opened in Cherokee in 1976, and was remodeled and expanded during the 1980s.

Earlier this year, a \$3.5 million renovation of the museum's exhibit area was completed to allow the museum to continue to tell the Cherokee story in the most effective way.

The new exhibit area uses state-of-the-art technology, including fiber optics, special effects, and computer-generated images and sophisticated audio systems. It relates to the visitor the traditional Cherokee explanation of how the world came to be, and follows the Cherokee through history and into the 20th century.

The new exhibit area's technology makes Cherokee history a personal experience. Interactive opportunities abound, and the museum's artifact collection is show-cased in settings that explain how each item was used.

Ken Blankenship, museum director since 1986, explains: "The history is the same, only now we're telling the story with a stronger sense of history and in a more personal way. We're still in the business of explaining how our people have survived, only now visitors get more involved."

In addition to carrying out its mission to perpetuate the history, culture and stories of the Cherokee people, the museum houses more than 1,400 published volumes and collections of manuscripts, photographs and microfilm.

Through its outreach program, the museum offers free lectures and demonstrations to school groups and organizations within a 100-mile radius of Cherokee

It also maintains an ongoing schedule of Cherokee artisans who demonstrate both ancient and modern art forms.

The museum is the 23rd recipient of the Mountain Heritage Award.

Some past recipients with ties to the Cherokee people include the Cherokee Historical Association, writer and historian Mary Ulmer Chiltoskey, Qualla Arts and Craft Mutual, and linguist Robert Henry Bushyhead.

Award winners are chosen by a special committee. Guidelines established in 1976 mandate that the award be given to honor individuals and organizations that provide "outstanding contributions to the preservation or interpretation of the history and culture of southern Appalachia, or outstanding contributions to research on, or interpretation of, Southern Appalachian issues."