¨Chiltoskey Receives Mountain Heritage Award"
-Mary Ulmer

Chiltoskey – teacher, librarian and keeper of Cherokee tribal myths, legend and medicine lore – was presented with the 1986 Mountain Heritage Award Saturday by Western Carolina University.

The award was made during Western's 12th annual Mountain Heritage Day activities, which enjoyed another record year. More than 35,000 visitors were estimated to have attended the celebration, including Gov. Jim Martin who spent about two hours on the WCU campus.

"This is a great occasion," Martin said during an appearance on the Belk Building stage. "There are so many things to celebrate … the arts, the crafts, the way of life of these mountains. This also is an occasion to think back about the people who settled these mountains.

"The friendliness of the mountains is matched by the friendliness of the people here," Martin said.

During his visit, Martin and WCU Chancellor Myron L. Coulter engaged in a horseshoe- pitching contest, and Martin dropped by the moonshine still for a "stiff sniff" of a homemade batch made by R.O. Wilson of Cullowhee.

The Mountain Heritage Award was made to Mrs. Chiltoskey in a late-afternoon ceremony at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Coulter.

"We honor a woman who for a major part of her life has led the way in preserving for modern peoples the cultural heritage of did this first, for the Cherokee themselves but in the process she helped preserve it for all of us."

Coulter said Mary Ulmer Chiltoskey, wife of famed Cherokee woodcarver going Back Chiltoskey, has been a major force in collecting, writing and sharing the way of life of the Cherokee for 44 years.

Mrs. Chiltoskey came to Cherokee in 1942 to teach at the Cherokee Indian School. "She came to teach mathematics," Coulter said. "But in one of those twists of fate that alter the affairs of people she soon was made a teacher of social studies and assigned the role of librarian. Starting with a few books in a virtually empty room, she built a collection that includes authentic Cherokee legends and lore, a part of Cherokee culture that until then was largely unrecorded in writing. She did this against considerable odds, even to defying orders to throw out the Cherokee material she had gathered."

She is the author of three books: "To Make My Bread: A Cherokee Cookbook," "Cherokee Words" and "Cherokee Plants: Their Uses … A 400-Year History."

The Mountain Heritage Award is given for activities that have helped preserve and interpret the history and culture of Western North Carolina.

"The first heritage of Western North Carolina," Coulter said, "is that of the Native American Indian; first those ancient forerunners of the Eastern Indians and in more recent centuries the Cherokee People. From its inception, the Mountain Heritage Center at Western Carolina University has acknowledged the primacy of our Indian heritage."

There were more than 220 craft and food vendors along the Mountain Heritage Day midway, a record number, according to Mountain Heritage Day chairman Doug Davis who summed up this year's event as "a fun day for everyone." Davis said the unusually high

temperature may have limited the length of time visitors stayed around uncovered Belk stage and midway areas. “But we’ll never complain about sunshine,” he said.

“Mountain Heritage Day requires a lot of effort and the resourcefulness of many people starting with the Mountain Heritage Day Committee. The success of the day reflects the hard work of these people,” he said.