WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY NEWS

Office of News Services: Bill Studenc, Director; Randall Holcombe; John Kenyon (828) 227-7327 or 227-7122

DATE MAILED: Sept. 25, 2004

CONTACT: Randall Holcombe
Office: (828) 227-7327
Home: (828) 631-3197

WESTERN'S MOUNTAIN HERITAGE AWARD PRESENTED TO CHEROKEE TRADITIONALIST WALKER CALHOUN

CULLOWHEE – Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Award for 2004 was presented Saturday (Sept. 25) to Cherokee elder Walker Calhoun in honor of his lifelong commitment to passing on to future generations the Cherokee tribe's traditional songs and sacred ceremonies.

Western Chancellor John W. Bardo presented the award to Calhoun during a noon ceremony, part of activities at the university's 30th annual Mountain Heritage Day.

Born in the Big Cove community on the Qualla Boundary in 1918, Calhoun attended the boarding school in Cherokee and served in the military during World War II in Europe. He grew up speaking the Cherokee language and learned about Cherokee music and dance from his uncle, Will West Long, a medicine man with a vast knowledge of Cherokee culture, history and language, who had been taught the traditions by Swimmer, a Cherokee medicine man of the late nineteenth century. Will West Long's singing captured the imagination of his young nephew, who could sing all the traditional songs before he was nine years old.

Following Long's death in 1947, Calhoun and his relatives began teaching ceremonial dances to the younger generations. Through the years, Calhoun has continued to teach and practice those traditions, and in the 1980s he formed a family group, the Raven Rock Dancers, that revitalized the stomp dance tradition of the Eastern Band.

Calhoun received the first Sequoyah Award in recognition of his contributions to the Cherokee at a 1988 meeting of the Eastern and Western Bands of the Cherokee -- a gathering commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Trail of Tears. He received the North Carolina Folk Heritage Award in 1990, and in 1992 Calhoun was presented a National Folk Heritage Award by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Calhoun also has contributed to the preservation of the Cherokee language, providing consultation for the Eastern Band's efforts to revitalize the language. He also served as a consultant for the new $219 million National

Museum of the American Indian, which celebrated its ground opening Wednesday, Sept. 22, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Calhoun was among a group of 125 Cherokees from Western North Carolina who took part in the museum's opening festivities, which were attended by more than 20,000 Native Americans from 500 tribes across the nation.

Walker Calhoun is the 29th recipient of Western's Mountain Heritage Award. The award is given in recognition of outstanding contributions to the preservation or interpretation of the history and culture of Southern Appalachia; or in recognition of outstanding contributions to research on, or interpretation of, Southern Appalachian issues. Award winners are chosen by a special committee.

# # #