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Celebrating the retirement and legacy of the incomparable Dr. Leroy Little Bear

Everyone is invited to come together on June 18 to celebrate the retirement of Ikaisskini (Low Horn) Dr. Leroy Little Bear, ULethbridge's inaugural Vice-Provost, Iniskim Indigenous Relations, and to support the establishment of an endowed student award that will continue his legacy. After a lifetime of educational service, Little Bear is concluding his official role at the University of Lethbridge in June 2026.

Little Bear (BASc (BA) '72, DAsc '04) was instrumental in establishing Canada's first Native American Studies department (now Indigenous Studies) at ULethbridge in 1975. He is one of the leading experts on Indigenous governance in Canada and an internationally renowned advocate for First Nations education and governance. Born and raised on the Blood Indian Reserve (Kainai First Nation), Little Bear was one of the first Indigenous students to complete a program of study at ULethbridge.



"Leroy's counsel and vision have defined Indigenization at the University of Lethbridge since the very early days of the campus. He has made invaluable contributions to our University, our country and the world," says Shanda Webber (BA '05), Director, Iniskim Indigenous Relations, ULethbridge.

"With his guidance, the University has undertaken actions that meaningfully respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and leads efforts towards decolonization and reconciliation. Staying true to Blackfoot values of relationality and community, this event is an opportunity for us to come together to recognize Leroy's impact and to support Indigenous education."

The **Ikaisskini Indigenous Studies Gala: An Evening in Celebration of Dr. Leroy Little Bear** will take place on Thursday, June 18, 2026, at Excite Lethbridge. Proceeds from the gala, along with donations, will be used to establish an endowed scholarship in Little Bear's name for Indigenous students studying Indigenous Studies at ULethbridge.

“Leroy has dedicated his life’s work to Indigenous Studies and to supporting the success of Indigenous students in post-secondary education,” says Dr. Matthew Letts, Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science, ULEthbridge. “In the spirit of giving back to students, the Iikaisskini Indigenous Studies Scholarship honours Leroy and his foundational role serving as Chair of the Department of Native American Studies for 21 years.”

This capstone event during National Indigenous History Month leads into National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21. The University of Lethbridge and the Faculty of Arts & Science present this event in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Department of Native American Studies (now Indigenous Studies). It honours the more than 50 years of Little Bear’s many contributions to Iniskim and international work advocating for First Nations education, rights, self-governance, language and culture.

Dr. Leroy Little Bear

From January 1998 to June 1999, Little Bear served as Director of the Harvard University Native American Program. He was instrumental in the creation of a Bachelor of Management in First Nations Governance at ULEthbridge, the only program of its kind in the country at the time. His 1994 book (with Boldt and Long) *Pathways to Self-Determination* is used by law, political science and Native American Studies students across the country. His 1977 paper, *A Native Concept of Title*, was the first Indigenous-authored paper cited by the Supreme Court of Canada.

In the spring of 2003, Little Bear was awarded the prestigious National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Education, the highest honour bestowed by the First Nations community in Canada. Along with his wife, Amethyst First Rider, Little Bear also brought about the historic Buffalo Treaty between First Nations on both sides of the USA-Canada border in 2014. He was inducted into the Alberta Order of Excellence and the Order of Canada in 2016 and 2019, respectively. Little Bear was named ULEthbridge Alumnus of the Year in 2003 and was an honorary degree recipient in 2024. He also has an honorary doctorate from the University of Northern British Columbia.

He was a founding member of the UN working group on Indigenous Population, drafting the document that would become the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Little Bear had a role in the inclusion of Aboriginal and treaty rights in the Constitution of Canada. He was also a major proponent in drafting *Kainaisini*, a declaration by the Blood Tribe and the Declaration of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Little Bear remains a dedicated and dynamic teacher and mentor to students and faculty at the University of Lethbridge and continues to pursue new research interests including North American Indian science and western physics, and the exploration of Blackfoot knowledge through songs, stories and landscape.

“The University of Lethbridge, Iniskim, is such an important part of my life, and I am so honoured to have committed many years of service to this special place in Siksikaitsitapi territory that I know and love,” says Little Bear.

Gala tickets (\$150 each/ \$1,200 per table) are now available until June 5 or until sold out. A plated dinner will be served. The evening will also feature Indigenous drumming, dancing and entertainment. Each ticket includes a charitable tax receipt.

Those who wish to send messages and memories to Dr. Little Bear can submit notes and messages by May 18 by visiting the [event website](#). Exclusive event sponsorship opportunities are available until June 1.

To buy tickets, make a donation, sponsor the event or learn more about the scholarship, visit go.uleth.ca/LittleBearGala.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/celebrating-retirement-and-legacy-incomparable-dr-leroy-little-bear>

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Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.