NEA honors education activist Marty Meeden with Human and Civil Rights Award

Annual gala also marks 50th anniversary of the NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner

BOSTON—Recognizing his life’s work for equal educational opportunity and rights for all marginalized students and educators, especially Native Americans, NEA has bestowed Marty Meeden with the Leo Reano Memorial Human and Civil Rights Award.

Since 1967, NEA has recognized and honored those who have fought — and continue to fight — for human and civil rights. This year, NEA honored the outstanding work of 12 American social justice heroes at its annual Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner on Saturday, July 1, in Boston. The theme of the awards dinner is, “Living the Legacy: After 50 Years, Still We Rise.”

“Marty Meeden embodies the spirit of Dr. Maya Angelou’s beloved poem ‘Still I rise,’” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Through his deeds and actions, this human and civil rights hero is still rising and carrying the torch forward. Tonight, we renew our commitment to stand for racial and social justice and pledge to continue to shed a light on his work as he guides and inspires us all.”

Meeden started his advocacy work in college, where he decided to lead the Native American Student Alliance, which provided a haven for Native American students to gain support in their education and promoted the education of non-Native American students on issues Native Americans face.

Now, Meeden has become a leader in the fight to eliminate Native mascots, correct inaccurate curricula and debunk other misrepresentations of Native Americans and Alaska Natives in our academic culture. His impact in schools is widespread throughout the state of California and the nation, and his workshop presentations and trainings have been instrumental in preparing many educators and their students.

“I was humbled when I heard I was the recipient of the NEA Leo Reano Human and Civil Rights Award,” said educator and activist Marty Meeden. “Our work continues; it isn't complete. As long as we are viewed as second class peoples, I will continue to fight for appropriate curriculum, the ending of racial mascots, honoring treaty and land rights, improving graduation rates at all levels, protection of our sacred sites and respecting our burial grounds.”

As chair of the NEA American Indian/Alaska Native Caucus, Meeden advocated for equal educational opportunity for American Indian/Alaska Native Children. Even after his term, he continued as an active Caucus member and a role model for leaders and members. He is serving his third three-year term on the California Teachers Association (CTA) Board. His strong record of advocacy includes serving as co-chair of CTA State Council of Education Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, chair of the Council’s American Indian/Alaskan Native Caucus, and chair of the CTA Early Ethnic Identification Minority Development Program.

A hero within the native tribes, Meeden is dedicated to advocate on behalf of Native Americans whenever and wherever there is a need, from the classroom to the state capital to the nation’s capital.
To read his full bio, please click here. Watch this video of educator and Native American advocate Marty Medeen’s fight against degrading mascots.

NEA also recognized the anniversary of its merger with the American Teachers Association, which represented black teachers in segregated schools. ATA originally created the Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner, and, as part of the merger, NEA continues this important tradition 50 years later.

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The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.