



# AMERICAN INDIAN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING SOCIETY

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## **AISES ANNOUNCES 2017 PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

BOULDER, Colo., August 28, 2017 – The American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) announces the 2017 Professional of the Year Awards. AISES will honor the five award recipients at the 2017 National Conference, the largest gathering of Indigenous STEM students and career professionals in the United States taking place in Denver, Colorado on September 21-23, 2017.

The AISES Professional of the Year (POY) Awards is the program that recognizes innovation and leadership among American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawai'ian, First Nations, and Pacific Islanders in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) related disciplines. Through the AISES POY awards, individuals are nominated in various categories for recognition of excellence. Award categories included: Blazing Flame, Executive Excellence, Most Promising Engineer or Scientist, Technical Excellence, and the Professional of the Year. Finalists are selected by a diverse group of experienced professionals. Based on the overall evaluation of the categories, the most outstanding of all nominees is selected as the AISES Professional of the Year, and the remaining five awards are made in specific categories.

AISES Board Chair, Dr. Twyla Baker-Demaray, shared her thoughts on the award nominees, "AISES' 2017 awardees are inspiring a whole generation of STEM scholars. We live in a time when STEM is mandatory and recognizing these professionals and their accomplishments in STEM careers show there are no boundaries to dreams, imagination, and passion for Indigenous people in STEM. There is a high demand for STEM professionals and we want our AISES students and career-path members to be represented in those jobs. These individuals demonstrate that STEM is an adventure and will take you far in life."

"AISES' job is to highlight opportunities and careers in STEM, and frame STEM as a 'door opener' to a challenging, yet exciting and fulfilling career," said Sarah EchoHawk, AISES CEO. "There's a whole lot of talent out there and we want our members to get inspired, involved, and started in STEM. This year's awardees encapsulate every aspect of success. We are pleased to recognize their contributions to STEM and to Indian Country as a whole. The awardees are advancing technology, engineering, or other industries and they show that anything is possible!"

**Blazing Flame Award** - The Blazing Flame Award is presented to an individual who blazes a path for indigenous people in STEM careers. This award recognizes individuals with 10 or more years of professional experience with significant accomplishments in advancing STEM education and careers.

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The Blazing Flame award is presented to Brandon Polingyumptewa, a supply chain materials management analyst at The Boeing Company in Phoenix, Arizona. Brandon has worked for more than two decades with The Boeing Company and has demonstrated a solid commitment to diversity and opportunities for Native students in STEM. He has worked with the Boeing Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Business Resource Groups, Global Staffing, External Technical Affiliates, and Human Resources to attract, recruit, and retain top talent at Boeing. He is the lead planner for the P-8A Poseidon program managing supply and demand requirements, raw materials, production schedules, production quality, production delivery and performance. Polingyumptewa has provided manufacturing quality assurance for the Apache Helicopter, F-A18 Hornet, AV-8 Harrier and other aircraft. Brandon received a B.S. in Business Management from the University of Phoenix.

**Executive Excellence Award** - Executive Excellence nominees must be an experienced upper-level manager or a career-path engineer, scientist, professional, or academician who has significant department and budget responsibilities.

This year's Executive Excellence award is presented to Gary Burnette, Vice President, Enterprise Data Integration at IBM in Research Triangle Park, NC. Gary has been employed with IBM for 33 years who leads two divisions. He is the creative visionary for IBM's Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) Platform. He is also in Merger and Acquisition. He has created several applications to improve productivity processes, and is one of twenty subject matter experts across IBM. Burnette is active in IBM's American Indian Diversity Council and other multi-cultural programs. A member of the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Indian Tribe of Southampton County, Virginia, Gary served seven years on their governing council. A graduate from Eastern Tennessee State, Gary holds a B.S. in Computer Science with a business emphasis.

**Most Promising Engineer or Scientist Award** - The Most Promising Engineer or Scientist nominee must be a professional engineer or scientist with less than five years' experience after earning his/her degree. The candidate's early technical contributions should already indicate a promising career.

Dr. Thomas B. Reed from the Hopi Tribe is honored with 2017 Most Promising Engineer or Scientist award. Thomas is Senior Electrical Engineer with Raytheon in Andover, MA. His technical and professional achievements include patent applications, research grants, paper presentations (national/international) and invention awards. Thomas has contributed to developing intellectual property at Raytheon, as well showing exceptional skill in power amplifier and switch limiter design. Thomas is active in the Raytheon American Indian Network, the AISES Chapter at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and local charity work that supports education, STEM, and veterans. Reed completed undergraduate and graduate electrical engineering degrees at Brigham Young University and the University of California Santa Barbara.

**Technical Excellence Award** - The Technical Excellence nominee must have made a significant contribution to science, engineering, or technology by having designed, developed, managed, or assisted in the development of a product, service, system or intellectual property.

The Technical Excellence award is presented to Dr. Virginia Hernandez at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Dr. Hernandez is principal member of the technical staff in Research and Design. She is a team lead analyzing foreign nuclear weapon threats. Before arriving at Sandia National Laboratories, Virginia taught at the Central New Mexico Community College. She taught general chemistry to science, engineering, nursing and emergency medical technician students. As a volunteer with the Dream Catchers Science program, she taught concepts of physical science by making and analyzing peanut brittle. She has received patents, consulted on capacitor design, and provided intelligence information to

the highest levels of the U.S. Government, reviewing products written for the President and high government officials. She received chemistry and inorganic chemistry degrees from the University of Central Florida and Texas Tech University, respectively.

**Professional of the Year** - The AISES Professional of the Year Award is presented for overall leadership and technical achievement. This individual is selected from among the top candidates submitted in all categories; therefore, individual nominations are not accepted for this award.

The 2017 AISES Professional of the Year Award is presented to William B. Tiger, Jr. of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. William is the Lockport Plant Manager at General Motors in New York. William has mechanical and electrical engineering degrees from GM Institute and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. With 40 years of experience in manufacturing, William oversees a staff of over 1,000 employees and a budget of close to \$150 million. He has worked at five GM plants in the U.S. and Canada. William is a founding member of the General Motors Native American Cultural Network, and is an AISES Sequoyah Fellow. William has put together robotics competitions for Native American schools and communities. He has worked with his staff to bring in students to the Lockport Plant to encourage and mentor youth in STEM. At GM, he continually reaches out to new Native American employees to encourage them in their career and to provide mentorship about all the possibilities in a large company.

#### **AISES 2017 National Conference**

All 2017 Professional of the Year honorees will be recognized at the 2017 AISES National Conference Gala on September 23, 2017, from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. Videos of each awardee are produced and will be debuted at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala. Nambe Silver Eagle Sculptures are given to each recipient by the AISES Board Chair and Vice-Chair.

The three-day event will take place at the Colorado Convention Center where participants will experience educational sessions, networking opportunities, student research presentations, the largest College and Career Fair in Indian Country, and traditional cultural events. Over 2,000 participants are expected. Visit [conference.aises.org](http://conference.aises.org) to learn more and to register.

#### **About the American Indian Science and Engineering Society**

AISES is a national, Native American nonprofit whose mission is to substantially increase the representation of American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, First Nations and other indigenous peoples of North America in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) studies and careers. Founded in 1977, with a rapidly expanding membership of more than 4,000 individual members, AISES sustains 190 chartered college and university chapters, 15 professional chapters, and 158 affiliated K-12 schools supporting over 55,000 students. AISES has awarded over \$10.3 million in academic scholarships to over 5,000 American Indian STEM students. Through scholarships and internships, workforce development and career resources, national and regional conferences, science fairs, leadership development and other STEM focused programming, AISES is the leader in STEM opportunities for indigenous people of North America.

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