

## Elsie Paul receives Honorary Doctor of Letters



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Elsie Qaxustala's Paul, 78, beamed proudly as she received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from Vancouver Island University Tuesday.

VIU Chancellor Chief Shawn Atleo said Paul inspires everyone with her support for learning and higher education.

"Elsie's commitment to creating healthy communities extends far beyond the context of First Nations," said Atleo.

"Through her life and teachings she has demonstrated a quiet but very powerful form of leadership that is inspirational.

"Her traditional Coast Salish name, Qaxustala's, means a welcoming person with a wealth of knowledge, someone who shares her culture. This is a remarkably suitable name, given that Elsie is one of the few remaining Elders of Tla'Amin First Nation who is fluent in the Tla'Amin language and who has dedicated her life to creating healthy communities through learning."

Doug White, a VIU alumnus and elected Chief of the Snuneymuxw First Nation, said, "Elsie inspired me to become the kind of lawyer I am today."

White said he stayed with Paul when he worked with the Tla'Amin First Nation on treaty issues.

"I came to know what a truly amazing woman she is," said White. "Her house was always full of grandchildren, visitors, elders and people that were coming to learn from her, to gain knowledge from the teachings she has to offer our people."

Elsie Paul thanked her ancestors and the university for working toward inclusion of First Nations people in broader communities.

"That has always been my goal. I no longer want to sit at the back of the bus. I want to be part of the human race," said Paul. "I want to be involved and I encourage my children, my family to be involved and not to consider themselves not worthy to be sitting with the rest of the world, moving with the rest of the world."

Atleo said Paul has spent her life in service to others, in a variety of forms of justice reform and social activism, drawing on traditional teachings. She has set an example in living her own life and has shared these practices through her many professional activities.

Paul's life story includes attendance at residential school for only two years. She was raised by her grandparents who proactively avoided having her attend residential school if at all possible. She has enjoyed working with people and being involved in her own community of Sliammon as well as the City of Powell River and the Vancouver Island community.

Paul's career has focused primarily in the area of Social Work, providing her with opportunities to engage in and influence social change. She was one of the founding members of Tsow-Ten-Lelum House treatment centre, a healing lodge for Aboriginal people established more than 20 years ago. Through her work as Justice of the Peace, in Victim Support Services and Aboriginal Policing, she has made a lasting contribution to the well-being of First Nations communities. She has served as elder-in-residence at VIU's Powell River campus for the past two years.

Atleo, who serves as national Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), said the AFN recognizes the vital role education plays in creating healthy communities. "One of the key themes we are committed to is supporting First Nations families," he said.

"The rebuilding of our families and communities will promote education for our learners and participation in strong and sustainable economies locally and nationally. This is our time to empower our fast-growing youth population in ways that will ensure a future of opportunity, success and prosperity and promote the knowledge of First Nations languages, history, teachings and values."

VIU has one of the highest Aboriginal post-secondary participation rates in BC and across the country.



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