



## **Human Rights Award Ruth Harper**

The City of Brookings will honor Ruth Harper as the recipient of the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler Human Rights Award on Thursday, November 10, 2016. Dr. Harper is being recognized for being an uncommonly strong advocate for inclusion of minority students and has changed the campus climate as it relates to the Native American, LGBT and African American communities.

The Butler Human Rights Award presentation will be held in conjunction with the ABLE Awards for Accessibility, the Mayor's Awards for Historic Preservation and the Mayor's Generational Leadership Awards at the Swiftel Center on Thursday, November 10 from 5 to 7 pm, with the presentations beginning at 6 pm. The public is invited

to attend. Hors d'oeuvres and refreshments will be served.

As a long-standing integral member of the Brookings Reconciliation Council, Harper has been a strong advocate for tribal people in the Brookings area. She served for years on the Tiospaye Council, an advisory board of the American Indian Education and Cultural Center at SDSU. In this capacity, she has volunteered at the annual SDSU Wacipi (Powwow), donated food and money to the event, and involved her students. She has helped with the honoring ceremony to celebrate American Indian graduates.

Dr. Harper has contributed significantly to tribal college education by serving as a consultant for Sinte Gleska University's Human Services Program, and for the past year she has been coordinating SDSU's efforts to create urgently needed graduate course offerings and programs for tribal college members. For the past two decades, she has taken her graduate students to visit Sinte Gleska University in Mission to learn more about the unique role of tribal colleges, to meet tribal college students, staff and faculty and to participate in a service-learning project.

Many people in higher education and student affairs have directly or indirectly benefitted from Harper's organizational work and from her teaching and mentoring, including a number of tribal graduate students who have gone on to influential positions in higher education and who continue to look to her for support and guidance. Dr. Harper has planted seeds of change for generations to come in her students.

Dr. Harper stepped in to fill a void as faculty co-advisor to SDSU's Gay Straight Alliance and served in this capacity for the last five years during which time attendance at GSA meetings has increased from 10 to 50. Harper supported the GSA's hosting of drag shows which are now a popular event on campus. She

encouraged attendance at regional conferences for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. She supported and participated in safe-zone trainings where faculty, staff and students learn to create welcoming inclusive spaces. Harper helped organize a lavender ceremony which honors LGBT students who were graduating. “These students are active in more than just GSA, some are student-athletes, some achieve academic honors—they are simply wonderful students. I hope the lavender graduation becomes an SDSU tradition” said Harper.

As a member of the Brookings United Church of Christ, Harper helped enshrine the congregation’s “open and affirming” stance toward LGBT people in its mission statement and worked to make that position real in its worship, community life and outreach.

Harper also has helped to support the economically disadvantaged. She was a founding member of the Brookings United Church of Christ Empty Bowls Project which raises \$5,000-10,000 annually for hunger relief. She also lent her support to the creation of the Brookings Backpack Project which helps feed hungry school children.

“Ruth has accomplished a great deal with the typically limited resources for diversity education in South Dakota, and despite the considerable resistance to inclusion which is still unfortunately strong in our state and region” stated Charles Woodard, retired Distinguished Professor of English at SDSU and 2008 Butler Award recipient.

Dr. Harper retired as Professor of Counseling and Human Development from SDSU in August, where she worked for 22 years. Her research interests focused on college student mental health issues and American Indian college student success. She has co-authored three books including *More Than Listening: A Casebook for Using Counseling Skills in Student Affairs Work* (published in 2010) which is now used in 35 professional preparation programs across the country. She earned a BA from Cornell College (Iowa), an MEd at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and a PhD from Kansas State University.

“As Ruth retires from SDSU, I have no doubt that her advocacy for human rights will continue,” said Phyllis Cole-Dai, the 2013 Butler Award recipient. “It’s built into her bones.”

Ruth Harper and her husband Larry Rogers (who also recently retired from SDSU) have lived in Brookings for 22 years.

The Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler Human Rights Award is named after the Butlers, in recognition of their lifelong advocacy in human rights issues on the local, regional, national and international levels. The annual award recognizes significant volunteer efforts on behalf of human rights. Previous honorees, in addition to Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler, Jr., are Dr. Philip and Winnie Baker, First United Methodist Church, the Rev. Carl Kline, the Rev. Scott Miller and Lisa Wolff, Margaret Denton, Dr. Steve Marquardt, Lawrence Novotny, Dr. Charles Woodard, Dr. Geoffrey Grant, Dr. Timothy Nichols, Scott Nagy, Dr. Ann Marie Bahr, Phyllis Cole-Dai, Harriet Swedlund, and Drs. MaryJo and Richard Lee.