

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**February 10, 2017****Saskatoon Public Library Renames Branch in Honour of Dr. Freda Ahenakew**

SASKATOON, SK – Dr. Freda Ahenakew, one of Canada's most active proponents for the preservation and revitalization of the Cree language, had a Saskatoon Public Library (SPL) branch named in her honour at a ceremony today.

Family, community members and dignitaries gathered this morning to officially proclaim the library—located at 100 - 219 Avenue K S—as the Dr. Freda Ahenakew Branch. This facility opened in 2009 and had previously been named The Library on 20th Street Branch. The ceremony was held at Station 20 West, located adjacent to the library, to accommodate the large number of people in attendance. Other celebratory events are planned for the community to enjoy at the library during the day-long celebration, including video games, LEGO® Mindstorm robotics tutorials, Google Cardboard (virtual reality demonstrations) and the screening of *The Secret Life of Pets*.

"This is a very proud and humbling day for SPL, and we're so pleased to be able to honour the tremendous legacy of Dr. Ahenakew in this public and permanent manner," said Carol Cooley, CEO and Director of Libraries with SPL. "It is particularly fitting that Freda, who was such a strong advocate and role model for both language preservation and education, should have a library named in her memory."

The new name was chosen following consultation with Elders representing Indigenous people living in Saskatoon and area. The change was also prompted by SPL's commitment to responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action #79, and SPL's corresponding membership with Reconciliation Saskatoon.

"Even before her professional career took off, my mother was a strong educational advocate," said Dolores Sand, Ahenakew's daughter. "Going back to high school at the age of 38, and soon thereafter embarking on an impressive academic career, she showed by example that it is never too late to better oneself. She inspired so many people throughout her life, and it's heartening to know that her legacy will continue to live on through honours like this."

Ahenakew was born on Saskatchewan's Ahtahkakoop First Nation Reserve in 1932. She left school in Grade 12 to marry, but many years later noticed that some of her children were not engaged in their education. To lead by example, she joined her children on the school bus and completed high school at the age of 38. That was the beginning of what would become a tremendous academic career, as she received both Bachelors and Masters degrees and held professorships at both the University of Saskatchewan and University of Manitoba. She also served as Director of the Saskatchewan Indian Languages Institute from 1985 – 1989.

The Cree language was Ahenakew's passion and she gained significant renown for her pioneering academic work in this area. She published many books and academic articles, and spoke regularly at conferences worldwide—work that, in large part, sparked a revival of Cree and led many to realize the inherent importance in preserving all Indigenous languages. She received many honours and

awards, including two honorary doctorate degrees and the Saskatchewan Order of Merit (2005). She was also made a Member of the Order of Canada in 1998.

Ahenakew passed away at Muskeg Lake First Nation in 2011.

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