

College to honour outstanding alumni

Award recognizes personal, professional success, commitment to community

Special to The Okanagan Sunday

A highly regarded B.C. painter and a musically gifted young educator have been named the recipients of Okanagan College's 2010 Alumni Association awards.

Lee Claremont, whose vibrant Aboriginal artwork is held in both private and public collections around the world, is receiving the Distinguished Alumni award. She is a graduate of Okanagan College's Fine Arts diploma program (1989).

Ryan Donn, who many know for his musical talents, is a graduate of the College's Human Service Work diploma program (2003) and now works as a certified education assis-

tant. Donn is the recipient of the Association's Young Alumni award.

Claremont entered the college in her late 30s as a single parent set on becoming a graphic artist. But she couldn't resist her passion for paint and canvas and the college soon gave her the hands-on studio time she craved.

A member of the Grand River Iroquois Six Nations, Claremont's work took off, and she has since become an internationally respected First Nations artist and distinguished Aboriginal arts educator working at the En'owkin Centre in Penticton.

She received the Aboriginal Arts Development Award in B.C., the Angel Award for her extensive contribution to visual arts in the Valley, and was voted best artist in the Okanagan by public opinion poll five years in a row.

Recently, Claremont's work was cel-



Claremont



Donn

ebrated in a documentary on Bravo TV's series *From the Spirit*. The half-hour feature followed Claremont's life from her childhood growing up in Woodstock, Ont., to today.

Claremont said it's hard to believe how her life is turning out, and wants to encourage other women to never give up on their dreams, no matter what their age.

"I just kept going, and just kept working. I owe a lot to Okanagan College. I feel thankful to them. I feel

I should be the one honouring them."

Donn shares Claremont's enthusiasm for the college and what it did for him.

Donn said he entered the College's Human Service Work program in search of a bigger and better career working with children. But what he found was something that inspired him to develop his career in an even more powerful way.

"My instructor Michael Douglas gave us this mantra," said Donn. "What he said was: 'your job is to increase people's quality of life.' And that stuck with me in my first job as a CEA (certified education assistant), but then I decided to apply it to everything."

Donn has spent seven years at School District 23, and incorporates his passion for music into everything he does. He has released two CDs of his music, crafted and performed original material for the 19th

annual B.C. Student Leadership Conference held in Kelowna in 2009, and toured the Valley with his message to students about maintaining hope and fulfilling dreams.

"What's ironic is that when you're focused on increasing other people's quality of life, you get a lot more out of life that way," Donn said.

This year's recipients demonstrate what the college aspires for all its students — personal and professional success, and commitment to community.

"Both award winners exemplify the attributes of successful alumni and are extremely worthy recipients of the Alumni Association awards," said Kara Kazimer, president of the Okanagan College Alumni Association.

Claremont and Donn will be honoured by the Okanagan College Alumni Association at a gala dinner reception later this year.