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### Fort Peck editor receives Montana Free Press Award

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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April 17, 2008

**Contact:** Clem Work, UM journalism professor, 406-243-2160, [clem.work@umontana.edu](mailto:clem.work@umontana.edu).

### **FORT PECK EDITOR RECEIVES MONTANA FREE PRESS AWARD**

#### **MISSOULA –**

Bonnie Red Elk, editor of the Fort Peck Journal, is the 2008 recipient of the Montana Free Press Award.

The longtime Montana newspaperwoman received the award to a standing ovation during the School of Journalism Dean Stone Awards Banquet on Friday, April 11, at The University of Montana. The award is made annually by the UM law and journalism schools.

Red Elk, a member of the Fort Peck Sioux tribe, received the award for her courageous defense of free press principles. She founded her newspaper in Poplar in 2006 after being fired from the Fort Peck tribal newspaper, the Wotanin Wowapi, where she had worked for 30 years.

The tribal chair said at the time that he was unhappy with Red Elk's coverage of events on the reservation, including allegations that he had illegally used tribal money. "I didn't write his side, and I questioned things," Red Elk was quoted as saying at the time in the Great Falls Tribune.

Despite a heavy barrage of criticism leveled at her by tribal officials, Red Elk ran the new Fort Peck Journal out of her house to keep an independent voice going on the reservation. This January the Wotanin Wowapi folded – its circulation and advertising business having been



taken by the Fort Peck Journal.

The Native American Journalists Association awarded Red Elk its highest honor, the Wassaja Award in 2007, in recognition of “courageous dedication to the citizens of the Fort Peck Assiniboiné and Sioux Tribal Community and the rights of those citizens to a free and uncensored press.”

In a blog published on reznetnews.org, Louis Montclair, Red Elk’s nephew and a reporter at the Journal, said, “This may be the Fort Peck Reservation but it is also America, and all governments need a free press to keep our public informed. People have a right to know what their elected leaders are doing.”

The editor’s family and staff conspired to lure Red Elk to Missoula, a 10-hour drive from Poplar, so that she could be surprised with the award.

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Local, dailies, tribal  
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