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ADA DEER

1935-present

City: Keshena, Madison

County: Menominee, Dane

Ada Deer was the first woman to head the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and the first Native American woman from Wisconsin to run for U.S. Congress.

Deer was born in Keshena as a member of the Menominee Tribe. Her mother was a strong advocate for Native American rights, and Deer followed in her footsteps. She was the first Menominee to earn an undergraduate degree at the University of Wisconsin. In 1961, she was the first Native American to receive an M.S.W. from the Columbia University School of Social Work. Her work on behalf of the Menominee led to the Menominee Restoration Act of 1972, which officially returned the Menominee Reservation to federally recognized status. Because of this accomplishment, Deer became the first woman to chair the Menominee Tribe in Wisconsin.

Her political activism included running for Wisconsin secretary of state in 1978 and again in 1982. In 1992, she became the first Native American woman in Wisconsin to run for U.S. Congress. In 1993, Deer was appointed assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, as head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs; she was the first Native American woman to hold that position. While in office, she helped set federal policy for more than 550 federally recognized tribes. As an educator and social worker, she taught classes at the UW-Madison School of Social Work and, in 2000, she became director of the American Indian Studies Program.

LEARN MORE

“Ada Deer Receives 2007 ‘Robert and Belle Case La Follette Award for Distinction in Public Service.’” Wisconsin Historical Society. <http://wihist.org/1yq5G47>.

“Ada E. Deer Facts.” Your Dictionary. <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/ada-e-deer>.

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