

SF woman given top honor

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San Francisco's Mission district received a visit from California first lady Maria Shriver on Wednesday, who was there to kick off Women's History Month by honoring the leader of the Friendship House.

Last year, Shriver bestowed her Minerva Award — which she created six years ago to honor remarkable women — to Helen Waukazoo, a Navajo Indian who runs the Friendship House. The house is an addiction rehabilitation facility that primarily treats American Indians.



(The Examiner)

Shriver and her entourage toured the 80-bed addiction recovery facility and then were presented with an American Indian star quilt and other gifts by the staff of the house, before sitting and listening to several residents' stories of addiction, alcoholism and recovery.

Facility CEO Waukazoo was chosen as one of four recipients of the Minerva Award for her role in founding and expanding the Friendship House. The facility began in the Western Addition as a drop-in program, but opened a new four-story facility on Julian Street in the Mission district in 2005. The facility uses American Indian healing practices, including a sweat lodge, as part of the addiction recovery process.

Waukazoo lived with her family herding sheep on a New Mexico reservation until she was 13, when she became one of the thousands of American Indian children rounded up and sent to a government-run boarding school for integration purposes. She wound up in San Francisco and began working at the Friendship House as a secretary before rising in the ranks to president.

On the tour of the facility Wednesday, Shriver confided to Waukazoo that she, too, had spent time on a reservation herding sheep as a child — her father, politician and activist Sargent Shriver, sent a teenage Maria to spend time living on a Navajo reservation, an experience she said she didn't appreciate at the time.

"I did not care for it at all," she said. "I said, 'Dad, I really don't want to grow up to be a sheepherder!'"