Reverend Robert Chase to Receive 1st Annual Wanishi Award

On October 15th, Intersections Founding Director Rev. Robert Chase will receive the First Annual Nitchen Wanishi Award for his support and action on behalf of the Native American community and Nitchen's work. Nitchen, which means "our children" in the Lenni-Lenape language, is a non-profit organization that advocates for the education and health of New York City's Native American youth. The honoring ceremony will be held on opening night of *Manahatta Today: Indigenous Art of N.Y.C.*, a fundraiser for Nitchen that runs October 15 - November 14 at the Arts Horizon Leroy Neiman Art Center Gallery in Harlem.

Yvonne Dennis (Cherokee/Sand Hill), a founder of Nitchen and an award-winning author and activist, said Bob is being honored not only for his instrumental role creating the 2009 Healing Turtle Island Ceremony with the original Lenape inhabitants of New York; but also for his "genuine and sincere commitment to doing the right thing."

"He sees us as people rather than a cause," Dennis said. While many people are unaware or ignore social and political injustices against Native Americans today, "Bob wanted to know, and wanted to take action," she explained. "He was really open and willing to learn. On a personal and professional level, he is a wonderful person who sees what is wrong with the world and tries to fix it."

Dennis said that Native American students have the highest school drop out rates; they need equal footing in our academic systems, but also have deep cultural needs that come from the separation from their heritage. "Imagine going to school and being told your ancestors were savages," she said. Since Native peoples were not allowed to practice their religious rituals until the 1978 passing of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, widespread dominant culture oppression led to a "trauma of unresolved grief." Dennis said that Nitchen and its supporters have always looked at people holistically, knowing that "to have balance and health we must work for emotional, physical and spiritual balance, in addition to putting money toward sensitive and appropriate education."

Dennis said that although NYC has the largest population of Native Americans of any U.S. city, many turn a blind eye to the issues. "Bob takes up struggles that are not popular," Dennis said."He walks his talk." Which is why he is one of the first recipients of the Wanishi Award, which recognizes the outstanding dedication of individuals to the Native American community and the ultimate goal to "cure racism against Native people," Dennis said. Wanishi means "a really big thank you".

The honoring ceremony will include performances by Indigenous dancers and drummers, traditional Native Hawaiian chant and puppeteering. It will be held October 15 from 6 - 9pm at the Arts Horizon Leroy Neiman Art Center Gallery, 2785 Frederick Douglass Blvd. Suggested donation is $10.

For more about the event and Nitchen, visit [www.childrensculturalcenterofnativeamerica.org](http://www.childrensculturalcenterofnativeamerica.org).