

An Open Letter to the Herbalist Community from the AHG

As many already know, for the past three years we have given an annual award to recognize an herbalist, herbal project, or program working towards deep structural change and social justice. Until now, this award had been named after Victoria Fortner, a long-standing Council member of the Guild who passed in 2014. This fall, it was brought to our attention that Fortner's claim of Shawnee heritage was not based in fact.

Firstly, we would like to thank the various people who brought this important truth to our attention. Secondly, we sincerely apologize to the Shawnee people and to anyone else rightly offended by this false claim.

We recognize that over the years, despite success in myriad ways, some dynamics of social power and privilege have been unfortunately mirrored in the structure and actions of our organization. For the past several years, we have engaged in making change within the Guild to counteract this fact, and have been gratified to receive positive feedback from members and others in the herbal community. That said, we know we are at the beginning of a long process of paradigm shifting and there is much work that remains to be done.

The American Herbalists Guild acknowledges that we have appeared to condone cultural appropriation as evidenced by the naming of our annual award, as well as other actions. We do not condone cultural appropriation. In fact, our goal is creating a respectful, welcoming organization for the furtherance of herbal medicine and all herbalists, herbal traditions, and cultures. In this spirit, we are taking the following concrete actions to address this misrepresentation.

- The Guild is removing the reference to-Victoria Fortner in our diversity initiatives, including the Award. The AHG will offer past recipients of the award an updated version with the new title. Changes to our materials bearing this name will be made promptly.
- The Guild is reviewing and revising our Code of Ethics, Mission and Value statements with this situation in mind, acknowledging the significance of language while knowing these statements are superficial gestures without meaningful action.
- We pledge to seek guidance on the most meaningful and effective ways to increase internal capacity and awareness. This may include, but certainly not be limited to, implementing training(s) and other dialogue for AHG staff and leadership council on issues of equity.

We will continue to welcome suggestions from the community, while we also understand that this ongoing work is the responsibility of individuals and organizations holding positions of systemic, social, and cultural privilege. We are extremely grateful for the feedback we recently received, and we offer this statement not as a final response, but as a beginning of what we hope will evolve into ongoing dialogue.

In Partnership,

The American Herbalists Guild