

Media Release

Announcing the 2018 Summit of Excellence Award winner, accomplished Quebec climber Jacques Olek.

Banff, AB. October 9, 2018 – Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival is proud to announce 73-year-old Jacques Olek as the 2018 recipient of the Summit of Excellence Award, which recognizes an outstanding individual who made a significant contribution to mountain life in Canada.

Regarded as a pioneer in the Quebec mountaineering community, Olek devoted his life to mountain culture by leading difficult winter expeditions around the world and teaching the love of climbing to others.

“Jacques is a pioneer who spent a lifetime promoting mountain culture,” said Louis Rousseau, Summit of Excellence selection committee member. “He’s a humanist who travels not to conquer mountains, but to let his heart be conquered by the people he meets. He inspired so many to dream big, to go beyond, to play outside with passion and have the feeling of being free.”

A proud Canadian of Polish descent, Olek has been a leader to Canadian mountaineers for decades. A champion of winter climbing, he was part of a Polish-Canadian expedition that made the first winter summit of Cho Oyu (8201 metres) in 1985. In 1987-88, Olek joined a team of Polish, British, and Canadian climbers to attempt the first push for the summit of K2 in winter. The team reached 7,300 metres before harsh conditions forced them to turn around. To this day, no one has made a winter ascent to the summit of K2.

Olek ran an outdoor store in Montreal – Blacks International – allowing him to inspire thousands of Canadians to take on new challenges, learn new skills and be passionate about getting outside. He spent a lifetime building and supporting the outdoor community in Quebec, organizing the first Quebec expedition to Baffin Island in 1976 and to Mount Logan in 1978.

Arriving in Canada after fleeing the Soviet-controlled Poland on foot across the Alps to Austria, Olek has a long list of climbs around the world: in Pakistan, Mongolia, China, Tibet including some of the world’s most challenging peaks (Nanga Parbat, Shishapangma, Makalu, to name a few).

“In 1981, I met visionary Polish mountain climber Andrzej Zawada,” said Summit of Excellence award winner Jacques Olek, “the leader of a Polish national expedition who made the first winter ascent of Everest in 1980, paving the way for the winter climbing tradition on the 8000ers. This meeting was crucial because it allowed Canadian mountaineers to contribute to the Himalayan winter climbing history.”

Presented by the Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival since 1987, the annual Summit of Excellence Award is presented in memory of Calgary climber Bill March, an internationally respected mountaineer, author, and educator, who led Canada’s first successful Everest climb in 1982. Recent award recipients include Don Serl (2017), David P. Jones (2016), Pierre Lemire (2015), Urs Kallen (2014), Ben Gadd (2013), Geoff Powter (2012), and Philippe Delesalle (2011).

The 2018 Summit of Excellence Award is sponsored by Norseman Outdoor Specialist and Yamnuska Mountain Adventures. The award will be presented at the opening night at this year’s Festival on Saturday, October 27.

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About Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival: Created 43 years ago, Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival has become the premier event of its kind in the world. The nine-day Festival hosted by Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Banff, Canada, showcases the world’s best films, books and photographs on mountain subjects – climbing, culture, environment and natural history, exploration and adventure, wildlife, and sport – and attracts the biggest names in mountaineering, adventure filmmaking, and explorers as presenters and speakers. An international jury will also award over \$40,000 in prizes for films and books submitted to this year’s Festival competitions.

About Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity: Founded in 1933, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity is a learning organization built upon an extraordinary legacy of excellence in artistic and creative development. What started as a single course in drama has grown to become the global organization leading in arts, culture, and creativity across dozens of disciplines. From our home in the stunning Canadian Rocky Mountains, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity aims to inspire everyone who attends our campus – artists, leaders, and thinkers – to unleash their creative potential and realize their unique contribution to society through cross-disciplinary learning opportunities, world-class performances, and public outreach. www.banffcentre.ca