

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 28, 2009

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Two Native Community Development Financial Institutions Honored for Achievements in Helping Build Native Economies

Charlotte, N.C. // Two Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs) were honored yesterday for their **commitment to community development and asset building** in Native communities at the 2009 Native Awards Ceremony, part of the 6th Annual Native CDFI Convening hosted by Opportunity Finance Network (OFN) and First Nations Oweesta Corporation (Oweesta).

The **Circle of Honor Award** recognizes a Native CDFI that strives to increase capital and access to financial resources in Native communities by developing innovative loan products, technical assistance services, and overcoming challenges. This year's winner of the Circle of Honor Award was **Cook Inlet Lending Center (CILC)**, a housing CDFI located in **Anchorage, Alaska**. CILC's mission is to promote community and economic development throughout south central Alaska by the provision of lending services and products; and increased access to credit markets, particularly for low and moderate income families, individuals, and minorities. Its primary services include second mortgages, down payment assistance and financial counseling. CILC serves all residents of the Cook Inlet Region, but 80% of their clients are Alaska Natives or Native Americans.

Selected from a highly competitive group of Native CDFI nominees, CILC received the Circle of Honor award for demonstrating strong financial performance, developing strong partnerships, maintaining a diversification of funding sources, and significantly impacting their market. CILC is led by Carol Gore. Cindy Mittlestadt, Senior Manager, accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

The **Visionary Leader Award** recognizes a person who embodies a long-term contribution to the Native CDFI industry, and whose local asset building efforts make them an inspiration for others as the Native CDFI industry grows and matures. **Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation (CPCDC)'s Executive Director Kristi Coker** was selected to receive the Visionary Leader Award for Outstanding Achievement. She is the founding director of CPCDC which declares itself as the most active Native CDFI business in the nation. Kristi is a highly visible leader in the Native CDFI industry, and has helped transition CPCDC from a local Native CDFI to an institution that competes in the mainstream CDFI industry. What distinguishes Ms. Coker as a leader is not just her ability to lead her organization, but also her willingness to provide her time and expertise as a mentor and to share her organizational information to assist other Native and non-Native CDFIs. As a Native CDFI visionary leader she has demonstrated a strong commitment to the Native CDFI industry. **CPCDC**

is a Native CDFI located in Shawnee, Oklahoma that offers training, technical assistance, loans and financial education and is a former Circle of Honor awardee.

“Cook Inlet Lending Center and Kristi Coker are two examples of perseverance, determination, and success in the Native CDFI industry,” said **Tracey Fischer, President and CEO of Oweesta**. “They serve as inspiration to their peers as many other Native organizations across the country are following in their path to empower their communities and develop self-sufficient thriving economies.”

“Native CDFIs are doing remarkable work under incredibly challenging circumstances. Cook Inlet Lending Center and Kristi Coker represent the best of the best in these challenging times,” said **Opportunity Finance Network President and CEO Mark Pinsky**. “Lending and development opportunities in Indian Country are still limited and we applaud the vital work of Native CDFIs in offering access to capital.”

The awards ceremony capped off the pre-conference Native Gathering, an opening event to the week-long 25th Annual OFN Conference where Native economic development practitioners and tribal representatives from across the country joined hundreds of other opportunity finance experts to share and learn about new ideas, strategies for change, and innovations from the field.

For more information on the awardees, please visit their websites at www.cookinlethousing.org and www.potawatomi.org.

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About Oweesta

Oweesta provides opportunities for Native people to develop assets and create wealth by assisting in the establishment of strong, permanent institutions and programs, leading to economic independence and strengthening sovereignty for all Native communities. Based on Oweesta’s Integrated Asset Building Model, its programs and services help build local capacity and provide powerful tools for Native community development. More information is available at: www.oweesta.org.

About Opportunity Finance Network

Opportunity Finance Network is the leading network of private financial intermediaries identifying and investing in opportunities to benefit low-income and low-wealth people in the U.S. Our financing delivers both sound financial returns and real changes for people and communities. Opportunity Finance Network originated more \$19.8 billion in financing in non-conforming urban, rural, and Native communities through 2007. This has generated or maintained 191,381 jobs; 43,050 businesses; 577,736 housing units; and 9,552 community facility projects. With cumulative net charge-off rates of less than 1.1%, we have demonstrated our ability to lend prudently and productively in unconventional markets often overlooked by conventional financial institutions. More information is available at: www.opportunityfinance.net.