

## PRESS RELEASE

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

**Albuquerque, N.M.** // Two Native opportunity finance institutions were honored last evening for their **commitment to community development and asset building** in Native communities at the 2008 Native Awards Ceremony, part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Native CDFI Convening hosted by Opportunity Finance Network (OFN) and First Nations Oweesta Corporation (Oweesta).

The **Circle of Honor** award recognizes a Native community development financial institution (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 **Four Bands Community Fund**, a certified Native CDFI located on the **Cheyenne River Indian Reservation (Lakota)** in **South Dakota**. Four Bands was honored for its strong financial performance, its focus on building new relationships with partners to continue the growth of the organization, and its activities at the local, regional, and national levels to support emerging Native CDFIs. Accepting the award on behalf of Four Bands were staff members Tanya Fiddler, Executive Director and Wynona Traversie, Program & Lending Director; and board members Mary Olive Johnson, Secretary and Jill Kessler, Director.

**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 moves forwards. **John Smith, Executive Director of Nii Jii Capital Partners, Inc.** received the **2008 Visionary Leader award** for his work creating the building blocks for a financially strong Native CDFI that encompasses three tribes in a geographically remote area. Nii Jii Capital Partners, Inc. , located in Wisconsin, is a partnership between **the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**, the **Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin** and the **Sokaogon Chippewa Community of Mole Lake**, together with eight municipal partners in northern Wisconsin.

"The efforts of Four Bands Community Fund and John Smith exemplify how innovative and strategic efforts lead to growth and development in Native communities," said **Elsie Meeks, President and CEO of Oweesta**. "These organizations empower their communities to grow around the ideas of self-sufficiency, asset building, financial literacy, and homeownership, all of which help Native families and communities thrive. CDFIs across the country have proven their stability and financial worth, especially in these economic times, and Native CDFIs and leaders like these are fast becoming part of that stable economic fabric in our Native communities."

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

The awards ceremony capped off an important week of events during OFN’s 24<sup>th</sup> Annual 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 [www.niijii.org](http://www.niijii.org) and [www.fourbands.org](http://www.fourbands.org), or to arrange an interview with the awardees, Mark Pinsky, President and CEO of OFN, or Elsie Meeks, President and CEO of Oweesta contact Kim Hayes at (301) 585-1131 or [khayes@keheditorialservices.com](mailto:khayes@keheditorialservices.com).

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#### **About Oweesta**

Oweesta ([www.oweesta.org](http://www.oweesta.org)) is a certified Native CDFI intermediary, providing Native communities with loans, investments, technical assistance, training and community development information. Its mission is to provide 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.

#### **About Opportunity Finance Network**

Opportunity Finance Network (OFN), the leading national network of more than 160 financial institutions, creates growth that is good for communities, investors, individuals, and the economy. To date, the opportunity finance industry has financed more than \$25 billion in underserved markets in all 50 states, yielding more than 200,000 jobs, 500,000 housing units, and 5,000 community facility projects. More information is available at: [www.opportunityfinance.net](http://www.opportunityfinance.net).