

PRESS RELEASE

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One Native Community Development Financial Institution and One Individual Honored for Their Commitment to Helping Native Communities

San Francisco, CA. // A Native community development financial institution (CDFI) and one individual who has made a long-term contribution to the Native CDFI industry were honored yesterday in recognition of their commitment to excellence in the Native CDFI industry at the 2010 Native CDFI Awards Ceremony, part of the 7th Annual Native CDFI Convening hosted by Opportunity Finance Network (OFN) and First Nations Oweesta Corporation (First Nations Oweesta).

The **Circle of Honor Award** recognizes a Native CDFI that is successfully increasing access to capital and financial resources in Native communities by developing innovative loan products, promoting community development and overcoming challenges. The 2010 Circle of Honor Award winner is **Four Directions Development Corporation**, a Native CDFI located in **Orono, Maine**. Four Directions serves members of the four tribes in Maine: the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Indian Nation, the Houlton Band of Maliseets, and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs. As both a housing and small business lender, Four Directions has a loan portfolio of more than \$4.2 million and has made almost 200 loans to tribal members since opening their doors in 2002.

Four Directions was selected from a highly competitive group of Native CDFI nominees and was awarded for demonstrating strong financial performance, diversification of funding sources and their ability to develop innovative partnerships to help bring increased access to capital to Native people in their target market. Four Directions is led by Susan Hammond, executive director, who accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

The **Visionary Leader Award for Outstanding Achievement** recognizes a person who has made a long-term contribution to the Native CDFI industry and whose local financing and asset building efforts make them an inspiration for others. **Anna Knight**, director of the **Cherokee Nation Small Business Assistance Center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma**, was selected to receive the Visionary Leader Award. Knight has been the director of the Cherokee Nation Small Business Assistance Center since 1999, and has managed the Cherokee Nation

Economic Development Trust Authority – a Native CDFI – since 1995. She is a pioneer in the Native CDFI industry. Not only has she created innovated financial products and business development services, she has been a strong leader and advocate for Native asset building efforts at the local, state and regional level. Knight has generously shared her time and organization’s resources to help other CDFIs in their development efforts. She has demonstrated a strong commitment to the Native financing industry and Native community development efforts for almost her entire professional career.

“We are proud to recognize the excellent work of Four Directions Development Corporation and Anna Knight from the Cherokee Nation’s Small Business Assistance Center,” said **Michael E. Roberts, President of First Nations Development Institute and its wholly owned subsidiary, First Nations Oweesta Corporation.** “These two award winners exemplify what it means to help strengthen Native economies, and we thank the Opportunity Finance Network for partnering with us to recognize this achievement.”

“The Circle of Honor Award and the Visionary Leader Award shine a light on those who demonstrate excellence in serving low-wealth and low-income communities in Native markets,” said **Mark Pinsky, President and CEO of Opportunity Finance Network.** “We are delighted to partner with First Nations Oweesta Corporation to support the important work of Native CDFIs, especially during this great recession.”

The awards ceremony capped off the pre-conference Native Gathering, an opening event to the week-long 26th 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.fourdirectionsmaine.org and <http://sbac.cherokee.org/>.

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About First Nations Oweesta Corporation

First Nations Oweesta Corporation 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 First Nations 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 (OFN), the leading network of private financial institutions, creates growth that is good for communities, investors, individuals, and the economy. Members of OFN are community development financial institutions (CDFIs) who deliver responsible lending to help low-wealth and low-income communities join the economic mainstream. Over the past 30 years, the opportunity finance industry has provided more than \$30 billion in financing to under-served markets nationwide. In 2008, OFN Members financed more than 200,000 jobs, 600,000 housing units, 50,000 businesses and microenterprises, and 6,000 community facility projects. More information is available at: www.opportunityfinance.net.