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## **Two Native Community Development Financial Institutions Honored for Their Commitment to Helping Native Communities**

**San Antonio, TX.** // Two Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs) were honored last night in recognition of their commitment to excellence in the Native CDFI industry at the 2012 Native CDFI Awards Ceremony. This ceremony is part of the 9th 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 is successfully increasing access to capital and financial resources in Native communities by developing innovative loan products, promoting community development and overcoming challenges. The 2012 Circle of Honor Award winner is **Lakota Funds**, a Native CDFI located in **Kyle, South Dakota**. Lakota Funds was established in 1986 as the first Native American CDFI serving the Oglala Lakota Oyate on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Working within one of the highest impoverished areas in the country, Lakota Funds has maintained a long track record, is highly active in financial education, has a number of VITA participants, and has actively assisted in creating and spearheading the effort to establish a credit union in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Lakota Funds is a leading model in the Native CDFI Industry, and an important piece of the history within the national CDFI movement.

Lakota Funds was selected from a highly competitive group of Native CDFI nominees and was awarded for demonstrating strong financial performance, diversity in creating lending products and development services to serve its target market and the commitment to advancing asset building efforts for Native communities on a local, state and national level. Lakota Funds is led by Tawney Brunch, 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. **Robin Danner**, President and Chief Executive Officer of the **Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement** in **Honolulu, Hawaii**, was selected to receive the 2012 Visionary Leader Award. In 2001, Danner founded Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement and developed each of its

programs including the first statewide Native Loan Fund, the Hawai'i Family Finance Project, the Homestead Self Help Program, and the Hawaiian Way Fund. Danner was the Vice- President and Branch Manager of the Nations Bank of Alaska, the former North Slope Borough and Tagiugmiullu Nunamiullu Housing Authority County Housing Director, and Indian Housing Authority Executive Director. She is currently serving as the co-chair of the Native CDFI Network, and a director on the Inter Tribal Economic Alliance and Native American Contractors Association. Ms. Danner, a Native Hawaiian from the island of Kauai, has spent the last 12 years uplifting Hawaiian families and communities by providing access to capital and technical assistance. Ms. Danner's years of dedication to supporting Native communities and passion of sharing knowledge is an inspiration to all leaders within the Native CDFI movement.

"Our two award winners have been an inspiration to the whole Native CDFI field, and have proven a commitment to their respective communities as well as the industry as a whole by demonstrating a leadership role in advancing self-sufficiency and opportunity for tribal members and their communities," said **Chrystal Cornelius, Acting Executive Director, First Nations Oweesta Corporation**. "We are honored to give much deserved recognition to our award winners, and thank OFN for their partnership in recognizing the achievements within the Native CDFI industry."

"Congratulations to this year's Circle of Honor and Visionary Leader Awardees for their dedication to serving low-wealth and low-income Native communities," said **Mark Pinsky, President and CEO of Opportunity Finance Network**. "Lakota Funds and Robin Danner are outstanding examples of how Native CDFIs—and CDFI leaders—are helping to expand coverage by bringing needed CDFI products and services to the distressed communities that need them now more than ever."

The awards ceremony capped off the 9th Annual Native Convening in conjunction with the 28th 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.lakotafunds.org](http://www.lakotafunds.org) and [www.hawaiiancouncil.org](http://www.hawaiiancouncil.org) .

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**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 Corporation's Integrated Asset Building Model, our programs and services help build local capacity and provide powerful tools for Native community development. For more information, visit [www.oweesta.org](http://www.oweesta.org).

**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) that deliver responsible lending to help low-wealth and low- income communities join the economic mainstream. Through 2010, OFN's Network originated more than \$24.2 billion in financing in urban, rural, and Native communities, and financed 782,907 housing units, 64,391 business and microenterprises, 7,674 community facilities, and created or retained 317,052 jobs. More information is available at: [www.opportunityfinance.net](http://www.opportunityfinance.net)