



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Native Community Development Financial Institutions Honored**

*Prestigious Annual Awards Presented to Two Native Leaders for Excellence in Promoting Financing and Community-based Programs in Native Communities*

Philadelphia, PA, October 22, 2014—As part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Native CDFI Convening hosted by Opportunity Finance Network (OFN) and First Nations Oweesta Corporation (Oweesta), OFN and Oweesta presented awards to two Native leaders for their excellence in serving Native communities in need.

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 2014 Circle of Honor Award winner is **Hawaii First Federal Credit Union (HFFCU)**, a Native CDFI located in **Kamuela, Hawaii**. HFFCU has designed and managed innovative, replicable financial products and technical assistance services, providing Native Hawaiians with access to affordable capital and loans since before Hawaii became a state. HFFCU obtained its CDFI certification in 2007 and has also created a 501(c)3 arm to serve the community with free access to job-seeking assistance, credit and debt management, one-on-one financial counseling, and financial education workshops offered by trained and certified staff. In 2009, Hawaii First was recognized by CUNA with the *Dora Maxwell Award for Social Responsibility* for its commitment to providing responsive products and services.

HFFCU's signature program, Nou Ka Hale (The Home is Yours), is the only one of its kind for Native Hawaiians to obtain and maintain residence on their Native lands. Since 2000, HFFCU has impacted 5,600 individuals with mortgage loans totaling \$350 million. Native Hawaiians received more than 75 percent of these loans. HFFCU's stellar performance has led the Department of Hawaiian Homelands to document the processes, procedures and policies for duplication by other CDFIs and credit unions. Laura Aguirre is the Chief Executive Officer of HFFCU, and accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

The **Visionary Leader Award** for Outstanding Achievement recognizes a person who has proven him- or herself to be an outstanding advocate for Native communities across the country. **Marvin M. Ginn, Jr.** is a member of the Choctaw Nation and is currently the Executive Director of **Native Community Finance (NCF)** in **Laguna, New Mexico**. Ginn has over 20 years' experience in community and economic development both in the private sector and in Native communities. His experience in banking and mortgage lending, together with his hands-on operation of two Indian housing authorities and a Native CDFI, have contributed to his ability to design and develop innovative products and services for tribes and tribal members in New Mexico.

Marvin was instrumental in the development and establishment of Native Community Finance. NCF began as a Pueblo of Laguna CDFI in 2007, however Marvin saw a greater need within New Mexico Native communities and with board approval expanded to provide products and services to all 22 tribes in New Mexico. In November 2012, Marvin approached the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department and together they signed a five-year MOU to provide for projects and needs of all New Mexico tribes. NCF provides homebuyers' education, financial education, and mortgage assistance to Native clients. Without this assistance, many Natives would not be able to secure a loan. He is also the first Native American representative elected to the Credit Builders Alliance board of directors, the treasurer of the Native CDFI Network, chairman of the loan committee for the Housing Assistance Council and has worked closely with Senator Udall's office to prepare and deliver a request letter to increase the NACA program to \$15 million.

"Oweesta is pleased and honored to recognize and celebrate our two award winners. The commitment and innovation displayed by Hawaii First Federal Credit Union and Marvin Ginn within their communities is truly inspiring. Though their work and provision of financial services in their respective target markets, they have changed the economic landscape within their communities and afforded their tribal members opportunities for true asset development," said **Chrystel Cornelius, 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 distressed Native communities," said **Mark Pinsky, President and CEO of Opportunity Finance Network**. "OFN Member Hawaii First Federal Credit Union and Marvin Ginn are both providing important services and support to the low-wealth people and communities they serve, as well as helping create opportunity for all."

The awards ceremony capped off the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Convening in conjunction with the 30<sup>th</sup> 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.hawaiiirstfcu.com](http://www.hawaiiirstfcu.com) and [www.nativecommunityfinance.org](http://www.nativecommunityfinance.org).

To schedule an interview with the Awardees, or speak with Chrystel Cornelius or Mark Pinsky, please contact Evette Aragon, Office Manager, First Nations Oweesta Corporation, at 303.774.8838, or Stefanie Arck, VP, Strategic Communications, Opportunity Finance Network at 215.320.4306.

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**First Nations Oweesta Corporation** uses our unique products and services to guide and empower people to transform Native economies into self-sufficient thriving systems. We use a holistic approach to mitigate long-standing barriers to economic development in Native communities by addressing four dimensions of development: institution development, financial education and asset building, enterprise and entrepreneurship development, and lending and capitalization. These dimensions are supported by our policy and advocacy work where we use our national voice to create and retain the integrity of policy favorable to building assets in Native communities. More information is available at: [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 2012, OFN's Network originated more than \$33.3 billion in financing in urban, rural, and Native communities, and financed development/rehab of 960,000 housing units, started or expanded nearly 94,000 business and microenterprises, and helped create or maintain nearly 600,000 jobs. More information is available at: [www.ofn.org](http://www.ofn.org)