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Two Outstanding Leaders are Recognized for Commitment to Building Economies in Native Communities at the 11th Annual Native Award Ceremony

Atlanta, GA. // Two Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs) were honored Wednesday in recognition of their commitment to excellence in the Native CDFI industry at the 2016 Native CDFI Awards Ceremony, part of the 13th 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 2016 Circle of Honor Award winner is **Taala Fund**, a Native CDFI located in Pacific Beach, Washington, serving tribal members of the Quinault Indian Nation. Taala Fund demonstrates outstanding leadership within the industry by overcoming adversity in a challenging rural economic climate, while meeting community needs for individual asset development and capitalization options for entrepreneurship efforts. Under the direction of Natalie Charley, Taala Fund has made rapid progress since their inception, cultivating strong relationships with the Quinault Indian Nation leadership, community programs, peers, mentors, and partners. Taala Fund has also developed innovative loan products to build their local economic engines in the ocean and fishing arenas.

Taala Fund was selected from a highly competitive group of Native CDFI nominees and was awarded for building and retaining strong partners and enhancing the quality of life and asset building opportunities for tribal members within their community. Taala Fund is led by Natalie Charley, 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. **Sheila Herrera**, Executive Director of Tiwa Lending Services, has been an

instrumental visionary leader exemplifying a level of commitment to Tiwa Lending Services since her tenure with the organization. Under her direction, Tiwa Lending Services has tripled their loan portfolio from 1 MM to over 4.5MM, providing tribal members first time mortgage opportunities, new home construction as well remodeling options for tribal homeowners. She has also forged partnerships with local, state, and governmental entities to propel economic development efforts benefitting tribal members located on the Isleta Pueblo Indian Reservation in New Mexico.

“Taala Fund, our Circle of Honor award recipient, is a great example of what Native CDFIs can be for their community in creating and expanding economic opportunity which otherwise would be available to tribal members. We’re extremely excited to be able to honor Taala Fund, and we know that they will continue to be a beacon of opportunity and hope to their tribal members. We were also very proud to honor Sheila Herrera with the Visionary Leader award. Under Sheila’s leadership, Tiwa Lending Services has developed homeownership options and strong partnerships to build long lasting assets for tribal members within their community.” said **Chrystal Cornelius, Executive Director, First Nations Oweesta Corporation**. “We appreciate the opportunity to give earned recognition to both award winners. We would also like to thank OFN for recognizing the achievements of these two recipients.”

“Congratulations to this year’s two award winners. OFN values the opportunity to recognize Taala Fund and Sheila Herrera and all their hard work. Their dedication to Native communities is inspiring,” said **Fran Lutz, Interim President and CEO of Opportunity Finance Network**. “Every single year we are impressed by the Circle of Honor and Visionary Leader award recipients and the Native economic development opportunities they create. This year is no exception, Taala Fund and Sheila are great assets to their respective communities.”

The awards ceremony capped off the 13th Annual Native Convening in conjunction with the 32st 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 Taala Fund, please visit their websites at www.taalafund.org.

For more information on Sheila Herrera and Tiwa Lending Services, please visit www.tiwalending.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.

Opportunity Finance Network (OFN), the leading national 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 2015 OFN’s network originated \$48 billion in financing in urban, rural, and Native American communities. This financing has helped to create or maintain more than 1,044,000 jobs, start or expand nearly 191,000 businesses and

microenterprises, and support the development or rehabilitation of nearly 1.5 million housing units and 9,800 community facility projects. For more information, visit ofn.org.