

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 3, 2017

**Contacts:**

**Heather Rademacher Taylor (Programs Officer, Oweesta)**  
303.774.8838 heather@oweesta.org

**Michelle Vroom (Public Relations for OFN)**  
610-228-0607 michelle.vroom@buchananpr.com

## **Three Outstanding Leaders are Recognized for Commitment to Building Economies in Native Communities at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Awards Ceremony**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA and LONGMONT, CO** – Three leaders were honored last Wednesday in recognition of their commitment to excellence in the Native CDFI industry at the 2017 Native CDFI Awards Ceremony, part of the 14th 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 2017 Circle of Honor Award winner is **Sequoyah Fund**, a Native CDFI located in Cherokee, North Carolina, that offers economic and community development within the Qualla Boundary, the home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Sequoyah Fund demonstrates outstanding leadership within the industry by overcoming adversity in a challenging rural economic climate, while meeting community needs for development of financial capabilities and credit counseling, youth programming, and capitalization and training and technical assistance for entrepreneurs. Under the direction of Russ Seagle, Sequoyah Fund has made rapid progress since their inception, cultivating strong relationships with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal leadership, community programs, neighboring cities, peers, mentors, and partners. Sequoyah Fund has also developed an innovative entrepreneurship brand, Authentically Cherokee, to support the marketing of contemporary Native artist-entrepreneurs.

Sequoyah 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 members in their community. Sequoyah Fund is led by Russ Seagle, 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. **Angie Main**, Executive Director of NACDC Financial Services, has been a trailblazing visionary leader exemplifying a level of commitment to NACDC Financial Services and the Native CDFI industry. Under her leadership, NACDC Financial Services has provided affordable capital to over 200 Tribal members across the state of Montana, lending out over \$1.5 MM. In the last year, NACDC Financial Services has seen significant growth with loan volume doubling from 2014 to 2016 and total assets increasing to over \$1 MM. She has also forged partnerships with local, state, and governmental entities to propel economic development efforts benefitting Tribal members located on all seven reservations in Montana.

Oweesta also introduced a new award; **The Rodger Boyd Nat'aanii Award for Advancing National Policy Inclusion** for his contributions to the Native CDFI industry. **Rodger Boyd** worked with the CDFI Fund in its inception and through his efforts established the first Native American Program within the Treasury's CDFI Fund. He also led the efforts to develop the first Native American Lending Study that highlighted the access to capital issue in Native communities. This study led to the Native set aside funding to support the development and growth of Native CDFIs. He also dedicated 13 years leading the HUD Office of Native American Programs as Deputy Assistant Secretary, impacting Tribal communities nationwide.

"Sequoyah Fund, our Circle of Honor awardee, works hard serving their clients to provide as a great example of what Native CDFIs can do for their community in creating and expanding economic opportunity which otherwise would be unavailable. We are thankful and excited to be able to honor Sequoyah Fund, and we know they will continue to be an innovative, and hardworking, group, providing support, encouragement, and opportunity to their community. We are also so pleased to honor Angie Main with the Visionary Leader award. Under Angie's leadership, NACDC Financial Services has expanded services to all seven Tribes across Montana to reach all Tribal members throughout the state. And finally, we are so thrilled to unveil this new award to special partners and people who are looking out for and protecting our industry. Rodger has worked tirelessly on behalf of Native communities his entire career, and the Native CDFI industry would not be what it is today without his policy efforts and we felt it important to recognize that and honor him in this measure." said **Chrystal Cornelius, Executive Director, First Nations Oweesta Corporation**. "Every year we look forward to the opportunity to give much deserved recognition to our award winners. We would also like to thank OFN for recognizing the achievements of these three recipients."

"Congratulations to this year's three award winners. OFN values the opportunity to recognize Sequoyah Fund, Angie Main, and Roger Boyd for their hard work and dedication to serving Native communities," said **Lisa Mensah, President and CEO of Opportunity Finance Network**. "Each year, we are impressed by the positive economic impact of the Circle of Honor and Visionary Leader award recipients, and this year is no different. We're also thrilled to recognize Roger Boyd's contribution to the Native CDFI industry through Oweesta's new award, The Rodger Boyd Nat'aanii Award for Advancing National Policy Inclusion. Sequoyah Fund, Angie Main and Roger Boyd are at the forefront of positive change in their respective communities."

The awards ceremony capped off the 14th Annual Native Convening in conjunction with the 33<sup>rd</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 Sequoyah Fund, please visit their websites at [www.sequoyahfund.org](http://www.sequoyahfund.org).

For more information on Angie Main and NACDC Financial Services, please visit [www.nacdcfinancialservices.com](http://www.nacdcfinancialservices.com).

###

**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 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](http://ofn.org).