

**TWO NATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS
RECEIVE NATIONAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE**

*Four Bands Community Fund and
Wind River Development Fund Recognized for Outstanding Work*

Miami, FL///December 14, 2007/// Two Native opportunity finance institutions – Four Bands Community Fund (Four Bands) and Wind River Development Fund (WRDF) – were honored today with awards for their outstanding work as Native community development financial institutions (Native CDFIs), Native economic development practitioners, and tribal representatives from across the U.S. gathered in Miami, FL. to share ideas and learn about ways to promote Native development and integrated asset building strategies,

The awards were presented during the second annual Native CDFI Award Ceremony and Reception in conjunction with the fourth annual Native CDFI Convening hosted by Opportunity Finance Network (OFN) and Oweesta. The Native CDFI Convening is part of OFN's 23rd annual conference held this year in Miami, FL.

Elsie Meeks, President and CEO of Oweesta, said **"In a few short years, Four Bands Community Fund and Wind River Development Fund have made exceptional strides towards helping Native people in their communities create assets and build wealth. Both organizations are led by women committed to making sustainable and lasting change for future generations. I am humbled by their work and am delighted to honor them this evening.**

Opportunity Finance Network President & CEO Mark Pinsky said: **"Native CDFIs are demonstrating the power of opportunity. With the support of the CDFI Fund (within the U.S. Treasury Department), a new network of Native CDFIs is growing to serve underserved Native markets. In many Native communities, CDFIs represent the sole access to capital or one of the very few means of accessing a financial institution."**

WRDF was the recipient of the Circle of Honor Award which recognizes the outstanding achievements made by a Native CDFI. WRDF, led by Lisa Wagner, is a non-profit corporation operating in Ft. Washakie, Wyoming that provides financial opportunities to stimulate economic development on the Wind River Indian Reservation, promoting self-sufficiency, self-determination and an enhanced quality of life. It offers a combination of training, technical assistance, loans and financial education, that helps community members create businesses that provide needed products and services. WRDF has made a total of 40 small business and micro loans with a very impressive default rate of less than 1/2 percent. They have created Painted Pony, Inc. an innovative for-profit subsidiary helps generate operating funds for the organization. The result of their efforts has been an increase in the number of jobs and services available for community members along with a dynamic strengthening and growth of small businesses on the reservation.

The Visionary Leader Award for Outstanding Achievement was awarded to Tanya Fiddler, executive director of Four Bands Community Fund located on the Cheyenne River Reservation in Eagle Butte, SD.

Four Bands was launched in 2000 and has since made over \$610,000 in loans that have created or expanded 70 Native-owned businesses on the reservation. It offers training and technical assistance to support reservation entrepreneurs and offers financial education classes and an IDA program to help families save to buy homes, cars, and grow or start businesses. Through Ms. Fiddler's leadership, Four Bands is leading the charge toward economic sovereignty for the people of the Cheyenne River Reservation. She has been honored for her efforts in the past, most notably being recognized as the 2007 Small Business Administration's Minority Small Business Champion of the Year for South Dakota and Region VIII- an area that encompasses Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and the Dakotas.

Oweesta's COO, Stewart Sarkozy-Banoczy said: **"Wind River Development Fund is being recognized because it is a very strong financial organization with diverse sources of capital. It has excellent insight into its community's needs and the development of products that fit its market. Tanya is receiving the Visionary Leader award because she has prominently moved entrepreneurship from concept to reality on the Cheyenne River Reservation. She has helped individual tribal members cultivate their dreams and talents into successful businesses in the community, while at the same time opening the eyes of the larger community to the realization that a thriving economy needs support and partnerships from everyone."**

The Native CDFI Award Ceremony was held at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino and featured a special performance by master flutist Sonny Nevaquaya.

Panelists and other presenters featured during the OFN/Oweesta Native Convening were: Lisa Wagner of WRDF, Valerie Powell of Choctaw Home Finance Corporation, Ted Piccolo of Colville Small Business Resource Center, Tracey Fischer, Elsie Meeks and Stewart Sarkozy-Banoczy of Oweesta; and Mamata Datta of Opportunity Finance Network.

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ABOUT FIRST NATIONS OWEESTA CORPORATION (OWEESTA)

Oweesta (www.oweesta.org), is the only national, certified Native CDFI intermediary. Its mission is to provide 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. Oweesta's provides Native communities with guidance, support and financing to help them develop permanent asset building institutions and programs. Oweesta also leads and manages the Native Financial Education Coalition (www.nfec.info) and Our Native Circle, an online Native community economic development resource center (www.ournativecircle.org).

ABOUT OPPORTUNITY FINANCE NETWORK

The Opportunity Finance Network is the leading network of private financial intermediaries with a proven expertise in lending prudently and productively in unconventional markets often overlooked by conventional financial institutions. Working in urban, rural, and reservation-based markets we deliver sound financial returns and real changes for people and communities. The Members of Opportunity Finance Network originated more than \$11 Billion in financing through 2005. This has generated or maintained 170,693 jobs; 35,441 businesses; 484,943 housing units; and 5,153 community facility projects. With cumulative net charge-off rates of less than 1% we are dedicated to closing the gap between promising opportunities and real accomplishments for our nation's people, communities, and markets that are outside the economic mainstream today. For more details, go to www.opportunityfinance.net.