



Quarterly chronicles of the economic resurgence movement on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

THE ECONOMIC RESURGENCE REPORT

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Winter 2013

Reservation Youth Bring Their Best Ideas to 5th Annual Statewide Business Plan Competition

Lakota Funds Success Coaches assist high school students in preparing successful presentations and winning business plans.

Lakota Funds, Oglala Sioux Tribe Credit & Finance Office, and the Kola Foundation collaborated to sponsor the 5th Annual Youth Business Plan Competition held in conjunction with the Annual Lakota Nation Invitational on December 19, 20, and 21, 2012 in Rapid City, South Dakota. This year's competition experienced a dramatic increase in entries with 40% over the amount of last year's competition.

Kadem Fisher, Lakota Funds Success Coach, comments, "Last year we were thrilled to have eighteen plans submitted, which was over double from the previous year. This year we had 25 entries, so we're ecstatic. It's gone from a half day event to

three full days now and outstanding presentations."

This year's entries came from schools all over the state, including Red Cloud High School, Little Wound High School, Crazy Horse High School, White River High School, Crow Creek High School, Eagle Butte High School, and Dupree High School. Students that enter in the competition go through a rigorous preparation process and must submit a business plan and present their idea, including management and operations plans, marketing plans, and financial projections, to a panel of judges. This year's judging panel was comprised of MBA students from the University of Illinois who volunteer with the Kola Founda-

tion, James Cantu, Shelly Wohaldo, Aaron Kumar, Brittany Hopper and Melissa Chua; and Debbie Stangle of Project Solutions, a local consulting firm.

From the entries in this year's competition it was clear that as the event grows and matures, the level of competition increases as well. Fisher comments, "Attendance is really picking up, and you could tell the quality of entries is also improving. It is really amazing at how professional the plans were. A couple times, the plans were so detailed that the judges didn't even have any follow up questions."

Lakota Funds Success Coaches began assisting aspiring student entrepreneurs to prepare for the competition in November by outreaching to reservation high schools and orienting students and staff with basic business plan creation. Initial outreach was followed up with individualized technical

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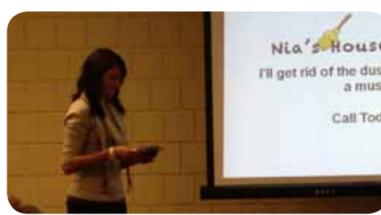
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assistance to help students develop their ideas into winning plans.

This year, Lakota Funds utilized new technology to provide online assistance to the business plan competitors. "It was great. We saved a lot in travel time and expenses, and I was able to share my desktop with the students and be really hands on in helping them make changes to their presentations," says Fisher. "Distance is always a barrier when working in rural and remote communities, but we didn't have to worry about that this year."

While all of the students surprised the judging panel with the level of detail in their plans, Maria Perez, 3rd Place winner of the Freshman / Sophomore Division was the contest's biggest surprise of all. Maria, who attends White River High School in White River, South Dakota, is a special needs student who chose not to reveal her disability to the judging panel. "She wanted to be judged on the same level as the other students and didn't want any special treatment," says Fisher who assisted Maria in her plan preparation. Maria's entire family came to watch the competition and was ecstatic to see her place in the statewide contest.

Tawney Brunsch, Executive Director of Lakota Funds, says, "For many of these students, the sense of accomplishment they feel after completing the business plan, then preparing and presenting their power point to the judges, is a victory in itself. It builds a sense of self-esteem that will benefit them the rest of their lives."

Winners were announced and presented with their awards during the Lakota Nation Invitational Semi-Final game. Winners of the Junior/Senior Division were awarded scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 to be applied to their higher education institution of choice. Winners of the Freshman/Sophomore division were awarded a variety of computer devices that could be used for educational purposes.



Sanja Vollmer, 1st Place winner of the Junior/Senior Division, presents her business plan to the panel of judges.



Link Tucker, 1st Place winner of the Freshman/Sophomore Division, stands next to his business plan presentation board.



Tianna Yellow Hair's, 2nd Place winner of the Junior/Senior Division, business plan presentation board.



Michael Dumont, 2nd Place winner of the Freshman/Sophomore Division, presents his business plan to the panel of judges.



January Tobacco's, 3rd Place winner of the Junior/Senior Division, business plan presentation board.



Maria Perez, 3rd Place winner of Freshman/Sophomore Division, stands next to her business plan presentation board.

5th Annual Youth Business Plan Winners

JUNIOR/SENIOR DIVISION | PRIZES PROVIDED BY OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE CREDIT & FINANCE OFFICE

1st Place (\$1,000): Sanja Vollmer, White River High School, "Nia's Housekeeping"
2nd Place (\$750): Tianna Yellow Hair, Little Wound High School, "Wi-Fi Rez...!"
3rd Place (\$500): January Tobacco, Red Cloud High School, "Jan Bam's Bakery"

FRESHMAN/SOPHOMORE DIVISION | PRIZES PROVIDED BY THE KOLA FOUNDATION

1st Place (Apple iPad 2): Link Tucker, White River High School, "Link's Little League"
2nd Place (Apple iPad 1): Micheal Dumont, Crazy Horse High School, "Skatin' By..."
3rd Place (Dell Notebook): Maria Perez, White River High School, "Mia's Wonderful Bakery"

Unique Partnership Creates Employment Opportunities

Lakota Funds and Oglala Lakota College join forces to help residents of the Pine Ridge Reservation overcome barriers to employment by furthering education.

Although the Pine Ridge Reservation is known to have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, Lakota Funds and Oglala Lakota College are working to remove barriers that local residents face in obtaining employment. Specifically, Lakota Funds partnered with Yvonne “Tiny” DeCory who heads the Child Development Program at Oglala Lakota College. This program prepares students to receive the nationally-recognized Child Development Associate Credential. Lacey Weston, who graduated the program and is now employed by Head Start, has found that by investing in her education she has also invested in her future and realized one of her life-long dreams of working with children.

Like the eleven other individuals that participated in the Child Development Program, Lacey received 131 hours of instruction to prepare her for the rigorous testing process which included written and oral

SUPPORT OUR MISSION

YOUR DONATION to Lakota Funds will help make a difference in the lives of the Lakota Oyate (People). Contributions from dedicated supporters like you help put an end to generational poverty on the Pine Ridge Reservation by reigniting the traditional Lakota spirit of productivity, commerce, and trade. To make an online donation, please visit lakotafunds.org/supportform.

components administered through an outside agency. “When I found out I passed, I felt good about myself, especially because I knew I could finally work with kids like I always wanted to,” says Lacey.

As soon as Lacey received her certificate in the mail, she started looking for work. Having her Child Development Associate Credential increased the possibilities for employment opportunities as well as the rate of pay she could receive. Lacey first landed a substitute position at the Head Start where she later was promoted to a full-time teacher position.

At the start of the program, only one of the participants had a job. Now all participants have found employment due to their investment in education. Tiny DeCory rejoices in the program’s 100% success rate, and comments, “Lakota Funds has taken the initiative to reach out to community members and make them more marketable in the workforce.”

Working full-time at a liveable wage has transformed Lacey Weston’s lifestyle. Not only is she gaining work experience by teaching her toddler class basic skills such

as coordination and hand skills, she is also learning about responsibility and gaining confidence. Lacey uses a portion of her earnings to contribute to her family household expenses and helps her grandmother financially as well. She recently attained a financial savings goal and now owns a car, a 2008 Dodge Status. “This is the first car that I bought on my own and is in my name. It feels good. I waited a long time,” says Lacey. Her vehicle purchase is the result of over three years of dedicated saving.

“Lack of education is a common barrier many of our residents on the Pine Ridge Reservation face in finding a job. This partnership we formed with Oglala Lakota College helped twelve people gain or retain employment,” comments Tawney Brunsch, Executive Director of Lakota Funds. “While eleven may sound like a small number to some, that is a huge leap of progress considering our circumstances and economic environment on the reservation,” she adds.

While Lacey enjoys her job, she continues to dream of possibilities in the child development field, “One day I would love to open my own day care.”



Lacey Weston, participant in Child Development Associate Degree program, poses at the Head Start in Porcupine, South Dakota, where she is now employed full-time.



Lakota Funds staff accepts Circle of Honor Award during the national Native Community Development Financial Institution Awards Ceremony in San Antonio, Texas

On October 17, 2012 Lakota Funds was presented with the Circle of Honor Award during the national Native Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Awards Ceremony in San Antonio, Texas. The Circle of Honor Award recognizes a Native CDFI that is successfully increasing

Lakota Funds Receives Circle of Honor Award

Recognized nationally for innovations and commitment in Native Community Development Field.

access to capital and financial resources in Native communities by developing innovative loan products, promoting community development, and overcoming challenges.

“Lakota Funds is honored to be selected for this prestigious award. We see the differences we are making on the Pine Ridge Reservation every day, but it is nice to be recognized amongst your peers as a leader in the industry,” states Tawney Brunsch, Executive Director of Lakota Funds.

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.

The awards ceremony, hosted by First Nations Oweesta Corporation and Opportunity Finance Network, capped off the 9th Annual Native Convening in conjunction with the 28th Annual OFN Conference where hundreds of community and economic development practitioners from across the country joined to share and learn about new ideas, strategies for change, and innovations from the field.

VICTORY | A CELEBRATION OF DETERMINATION

In January 2009, several community leaders started in pursuit of a dream to establish the Lakota Federal Credit Union that would provide basic banking services to help the Oglala Lakota Oyate (people) achieve their financial goals, and in turn help the local economy on the Pine Ridge Reservation to thrive. This was a huge undertaking, as the Pine Ridge Reservation had not had a financial institution of its own since the Oglala Sioux Tribe accepted the Indian Recognition Act in 1935.

Lakota Funds anxiously agreed to sponsor the proposed Lakota Federal Credit Union. A steering committee comprised of knowledgeable, energetic, and hard-working individuals began the long and arduous process of establishing the first and only federally-insured financial institution on the 2.2 million acre Pine Ridge Reservation.

In August of 2012, the Lakota Federal Credit Union received its charter from the National Credit Union Association and officially opened its doors in November 2012. Lakota Federal Credit Union offers savings accounts, check cashing, direct deposit and consumer loans, both secured and unsecured, to members who live, work, worship, attend school, or volunteer on the Pine Ridge Reservation. In the first seven weeks the credit union was opened, more than 260 new members opened savings accounts, 49 of which were approved for loans totaling over \$107K.

The Lakota Federal Credit Union is not just a financial resource for our people, it is a symbol of victory and of the self-determination that lies within our people here on the Pine Ridge Reservation. It is proof that we can overcome even the longest-standing barriers to self-sufficiency.

Lack of Local Services Inspire Lakota Family to Start Business

Big Crows utilize business loan from Lakota Funds to expand operations and fill gap in much needed local services for outdoor events on Pine Ridge Reservation.

After several years of using unreliable and expensive suppliers to furnish their outdoor sporting events on the Pine Ridge Reservation with porta-potties, Francis and Jennifer Big Crow decided to purchase their own and rent them out to other local people who needed them for events of their own. “There weren’t any vendors nearby that we could rent porta-potties from, and the ones we did find were either really expensive or didn’t show up,” says Jennifer Big Crow.

The Pine Ridge Reservation is home to many outdoor events, such as sun dances, pow wows, sporting events, and weddings during the Summer months, so their small rental business took off. The Big Crows set their prices at a level they thought was reasonable and affordable for the local residents, which turned out to be around half as much as the other vendors who would service the reservation area. “We know what prices people around here could afford, and we weren’t in it to get rich,” states Jennifer.

As demand for their business kept up, Jennifer and her husband Francis decided it was time to expand operations. That is when they reached out to Lakota Funds. “The Big Crows came to Lakota Funds with a clear objective in mind and worked to meet all of the loan requirements almost immediately. Their business not only provides the reservation with a much needed service, but also provides an entrepreneurial example for their children to follow,” states Tawney Brunsch, Executive Director of Lakota Funds.

The Big Crows began the loan process, which included completing a business planning course, with Lakota Funds in October and received their loan check by November 2, 2012. “Tonia Young at Lakota Funds was on the ball. If we didn’t understand something, she would always walk us around the block a couple of times,” says Jennifer Big Crow. She also comments the process with Lakota Funds was very smooth and went a lot faster than she expected.

With their \$25,000 loan from Lakota Funds, the Big Crows purchased additional porta-potties, a hand sanitizing station, a truck bed and tires for their company truck, computer equipment, and office supplies. “This lending opportunity has created a window of opportunity for them by increasing their capacity to take on larger events and service contracts,” says Tonia Young, Success Coach at Lakota Funds who worked with the Big Crows. Timber Ghost Outdoor Services has grown from a small two porta-potty business to a much larger rental inventory that now includes 28 porta-potties, a public announcement system, speakers, timing lines, and canopies.

Probably the most profound effect of the Big Crows’ entrepreneurial success will be realized through the experiences and knowledge gained by their four sons. The four Big Crow boys, ranging from elementary school to high school age, help their parents on a regular basis with the family business with things like deliveries and pick-ups of rental equipment. Jennifer says she teases the boys often by telling them, “You had better pay attention now because someday this will be all yours.”

All kidding aside, Jennifer and Francis Big Crow have literally broken the cycle of poverty for their family. Their entrepreneurial values, knowledge, and experiences will be passed down to their sons, positioning them for a self-sufficient lifestyle - something that is not very common on the Pine Ridge Reservation yet.



Francis and Jennifer Big Crow sign their loan documents with Tonia Young, Success Coach at Lakota Funds.



Francis and Jennifer Big Crow, owners of Timber Ghost Outdoor Services, display their loan check from Lakota Funds that they will use to expand their business.