



## NEWS FROM OWEESTA

Summer 2009

Oweesta News: Full Article

### **Finding a Balance Between Two Worlds**

*Tracey Fischer Offers a Personal Insight in Developing Native Communities*

"I always knew this is what I would do," states Tracey Fischer of her involvement in the world of Native economic development. Growing up on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota with a white father and a Native mother, she was fascinated with the dichotomy of the two worlds each side of her family lived in. While her father's side of the family was full of entrepreneurs and dealt in the world of banking and business, her mother's side regularly engaged with the tribal and federal government for many services and managed their finances on a cash-only basis. Tracey has always been aware of the differences between mainstream American values and traditional Native cultural values, but doesn't view either as "right" or "wrong". Instead, she recognizes that both have an important role in today's Native communities.

It is this viewpoint that makes Tracey Fischer such a valuable asset to the Native economic development movement and especially in her most recent endeavor as CEO of Oweesta. Tracey was officially announced as CEO of Oweesta on August 1st after former CEO, Elsie Meeks, stepped down to fill the position of USDA Director of Rural Development for South Dakota. Previously, Tracey had been director of enterprise and entrepreneurship development at Oweesta. She describes her first few weeks as CEO as an eye opener that has enabled her to see the bigger picture of the organization, "...whereas I was seeing the organization through a key hole in my previous position, the door is now wide open." She has spent this time examining the components of the organization and devising ways they can better work together.

Tracey does not intend to make any big changes as CEO of Oweesta, but rather plans on staying the course to further our core programs and execute our mission. "Oweesta's work is so important to Native communities, and in the short time of this organization's existence we have only scratched the surface of what could be done to help our clients reach their full potential. There is so much more to be done. Veering off course now would leave unfinished business."

Since her childhood, Tracey has seen a shift in the definition of "assets" in Native communities, and she feels her generation is the first to really understand and appreciate the mainstream American concept of "asset building". She believes this is where Oweesta comes into the picture. If a Native community wants to adopt mainstream America's financial values, its members need certain tools to manage their assets. Oweesta can help them develop institutions, establish programs, and set up systems but, Tracey cautions,

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DEVELOPING  
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BUILDING  
NATIVE  
COMMUNITIES

"...only if they want it. It is important that the mainstream economic development field doesn't push itself on Native communities, but rather respects Native people's unique cultures and development processes." In fact, this may be why Oweesta and its staff have had a positive impact in Native communities across the nation. We respect each Native organization's specialized path they choose to travel in developing assets and building their community. By adapting the delivery of our programs and services to suit each unique scenario, we allow Native communities and nations to grow and prosper in the manner and at the pace they desire.

Tracey obtained her law degree from Yale Law School in 1999. She also has a B.S. in business administration and accounting. Prior to joining Oweesta, Tracey practiced law and represented tribal governments on financial and community development issues. She also worked as a lender for Norwest Bank (now Wells Fargo) and as an auditor for the South Dakota Department of Labor. She has taught as an adjunct professor at the University of South Dakota School of Law on Indian Country economic development and at Oglala Lakota College in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, on tribal governance. In addition to her legal and Native economic development work, Tracey also served as the executive director of the South Dakota Equal Justice Commission, which was created by the South Dakota Supreme Court to identify and address the disparate treatment of minorities in the South Dakota Judicial System.