



November 2006

Membership Meeting in Havre November 18th

A special meeting of the members of Opportunity Link's seven Poverty Reduction Organizations (PRO's) will take place on Saturday, November 18th at the Community Center in the Holiday Village Mall in Havre.

The purpose of the meeting is to inform citizens in Opportunity Link's 11-county region of proposed amendments to the bylaws adopted in November of 2004. A vote to amend the bylaws can occur if at least four of the seven PRO's are represented. The amendments include:

- ▶ Formal recognition of the change in the name of the organization from Northcentral Montana Community Ventures Coalition to Opportunity Link.

- ▶ Establish the date for the annual membership meeting. At the annual meeting, officers who serve on

the board of directors are elected, and the president and treasurer report on the activities and financial condition of the corporation.

- ▶ Establish the terms of the directors, recognizing the need to stagger these terms in order to provide consistency in leadership for Opportunity Link.

- ▶ Clarifying that individuals within Opportunity Link's region are not members of the corporation, but are members of their respective Poverty Reduction Organization (PRO). Each PRO is a member of the corporation.

- ▶ Reducing the number of directors who serve on the board from 17 to 14.

- ▶ Process by which the board will mediate if they are equally divided on any aspect of the business of the organization.

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Regional Coalition, NWAFF Meet in Fort Benton

Over 40 community members attended Opportunity Link's bi-annual coalition meeting in Fort Benton on June 7th. This day long event at the Montana Ag Center Complex offered citizens of Opportunity Link's 11-county region, representatives of the Northwest Area Foundation, board and staff to meet and talk about the organization's mission, current work and near and long-term plans.

After a welcome from Board Chair

Russ Boham followed by introductions, Northwest Area Foundation Ventures Program Lead Gordon Goodwin spoke about the history of the Ventures program at the Northwest Area Foundation and the concept behind a longer term approach to poverty reduction. "The Northwest Area Foundation is not your conventional foundation. We are a partner with you in a regional poverty reduction effort, looking at change on a

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Established in 2005, Opportunity Link is a non-profit organization that strives to create and implement strategies and encourage partnerships that will reduce poverty in the region long term. Opportunity Link does not accept unsolicited grant requests but instead devotes resources to promote public-private sector collaborations to develop systemic solutions. Opportunity Link, Inc. is one of ten communities that have established a 10-year partnership with the Northwest Area Foundation (www.nwaf.org) which is dedicated to helping communities reduce poverty for the long term. For more information, visit www.opportunitylinkmt.org

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Ventures Lead Gordon Goodwin, Northwest Area Foundation

Membership Meeting (continued from page 1)

► Provides for the PRO to consider removing a director if they fail to attend three consecutive board meetings.

A luncheon will be provided at noon with the meeting beginning at 1:00 p.m. Opportunity Link staff and board members will be present, as well as Tony Looking Elk, Community Liaison from the Northwest Area Foundation. Attorney Jim Kaze will be available to answer any questions. "This is truly a grassroots effort, and without the engagement and input from members of the PRO's, our collective ability to identify root causes of poverty will be significantly diminished. We appreciate the efforts of community members to attend this meeting," said Executive Director Steve Galbavy.

To help defray some of travel costs

for participants, Opportunity Link will draw up to five names from each participating PRO to receive a \$25 gas card.

A copy of the proposed revisions to the bylaws are available through the board of directors of each PRO, or on the Opportunity Link website at <http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org> Please contact the main office at (406)265-3699 for additional information.



Tony Looking Elk, Community Liaison, Northwest Area Foundation

Register Now for Montana's Conference on Race 2006 November 28-30

Intercultural understanding, educational equity, economic development and health access as it relates to race issues are the foundation of **Montana's Conference on Race 2006: Partnering Indians and Non-Indians for Change**. Join state and local program personnel, educators, indigenous people, citizens, parents and students in Helena on November 28, 29 and 30 at the Great Northern Hotel.

New skills and increased knowledge are needed because of race-related issues, and this event will focus on creating an environment in which open, cross-cultural dialogue can occur to look at some of the unique race relations issues in Montana.

Keynote presenters include Dr. Roberta Ahlquist of San Jose University, Dr. Stephanie Fryberg of the University of Arizona, Robert (Tim) Coulter of the Indian Law Resource Center in Helena, and Anthony Priete, Director of the Montana Department of Commerce.

Montana's Conference on Race is a partnership of the University System, Office of Public Instruction, Governor's Office, various State departments and agencies including the Departments of Justice, Commerce, Corrections, Health



COMING EVENTS
→
Be sure to check the website for information about the Opportunity Link Annual Member Meeting that will be held in January 2007. Date and location will be announced soon!
www.opportunitylinkmt.org

Opportunity Link Welcomes New Staff Members

Barbara Stiffarm joined Opportunity Link, Inc., as the Development Director, on August 15, 2006. Barbara has an extensive background in providing community and economic development services. For the past five years, Barbara served as a senior staff writer for RJS & Associates, Inc. (RJS), an American Indian-Owned Consulting Firm located on the Rocky Boys Indian Reservation in Montana. Barb's major responsibilities included researching, identifying, and securing sources of funding for public schools, tribal governments, tribal colleges, Indian Housing Authorities, economic enterprises, and private businesses. In addition, she conducted external evaluations, feasibility studies, needs assessments, and market studies.

Direct client services included management training, strategic planning, preparing development plans, and providing project management services.

She was previously employed by the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council as the Tribal Planner/CDBG Coordinator. In her position, she served as the research and development manager for established and non-established Tribal services. Projects included housing rehabilitation, building construction, public services, and numerous economic development ventures.

Barbara is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Tribe and has resided in Harlem, Montana since 1982. She is married with three children.



*Development Director
Barbara Stiffarm*

Rebecca Bishop-Koncilya joined Opportunity Link as the Office Administrator on June 30, 2006. She holds an Associates degree in Architectural Technology from the Spokane Community College and is a 2006 graduate of Montana State University-Northern with a Bachelors Degree in Communication and a minor in Community Service.

Becki's involvement in volunteer activities both personally and academically enabled her to collaborate with others in efforts to look at some of the fundamental causes behind social problems such as chemical abuse and domestic violence.

An enrolled member of the Gros Ventre tribe, Becki is the daughter of Jesse James-Hawley of Fort Belknap. Becki has lived in Havre since the mid 1990's. She served in the U.S. Army stationed in Korea as a photojournalist and administrative assistant from 1980-1983.

Her volunteer activities include work with the Community Involvement Club program at MSU-Northern, as well as two programs at the District 4 HRDC in Havre.

Becki has a daughter, Renata, who is currently serving in the U.S. Army, and a son, Jake, a 2006 graduate of Havre High School.



*Office Administrator
Rebecca Bishop-Koncilya*

How *YOU* can get **involved**

Attend a local PRO meeting—your gift of time as part of an organized, coordinated effort makes the difference. Visit the website for to find a meeting in your area.

Visit our website—our website is a portal for you to stay connected to what's happening in our region. Sign up to receive our e-newsletter and other news online.

Visit our offices—our main offices are in Havre at District 4 HRDC, 2229 5th Avenue.

<http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org>

Photos by Helmbrecht Studio



MEDA members at the 2006 Fall Conference in Havre



Paul Tuss of Bear Paw Development with U.S. Senator-elect Jon Tester

Photos courtesy of Gloria O'Rourke of MEDA

Opportunity Link Sponsors 2006 MEDA Annual Conference

Over 100 people from across the Montana attended the 2006 Montana Economic Developer's Association (MEDA) Fall Conference in Havre on October 19th and 20th. The event was held at the new Applied Technologies Center on the campus of MSU-Northern. Opportunity Link co-sponsored the conference with Bear Paw Development Corporation and other local and state organizations.

Participants of the 2-day event had an opportunity to talk about economic development projects occurring in their region, and learn from representatives of State agencies and organizations what is being developed at the state level.

Presentations by various agencies highlighting current and proposed projects, including the Governor's Energy Development Plan, introduced

by Evan Barrett of the Governor's Office on Economic Opportunity and Tony Preite of the Department of Commerce.

Candidates for the 2006 elections spoke on Friday morning about their plans for developing Montana's economy and thanked MEDA members for their work both locally and as a statewide organization: Montana Congressional candidate Monica Lindeen, U.S. Senate candidate Jon Tester, and a spokesman for U.S. Senator Conrad Burns.

The event concluded with members prioritizing the 2007 legislative agenda and a tour of the Applied Technology Center.

To learn more about MEDA and information about the conference including presentations, visit the MEDA website at <http://www.medamembers.org>

Newly Formed Business Alliance Promotes Montana's "Indianpreneurs" *by Sue Woodrow*

Across Indian Country, economic development efforts have largely been in the form of tribal enterprises—businesses owned and operated by tribal governments. Private sector business development and entrepreneurship have generally taken a back seat when tribes plan and implement economic development strategies.

In Montana, however, tribal representatives and business leaders have established a new coalition to help expand private sector businesses. The Montana Indian Business Alliance (MIBA) focuses on strengthening tribal sovereignty and economies by drawing attention to the important role the private sector can play.

The seeds for MIBA were planted early in 2004. A small group of individuals led by Susan Webber of Nitztapi Consulting in Browning had been working to provide assistance to tribal members who were having difficulties obtaining funding for their small businesses. The group realized early on that in order for small businesses and entrepreneurship to flourish on Montana's Indian reservations, technical assistance and financing for business owners were not the only resources needed. A number of significant changes were needed within the tribes' legal and governmental infrastructures to create business-friendly and sustaining environments.

The group expanded as it began

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MONTANA INDIAN BUSINESS ALLIANCE
 Assiniboine
 Blackfeet
 Chippewa
 Cree
 Crow
 Gros Ventre
 Kootenai
 Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa
 Northern Cheyenne
 Pend d'Oreilles
 Salish
 Sioux

Business Alliance (*continued*)

planning a conference around these issues. The outcome, the Montana Indian Business Conference held in Great Falls in February of 2006, drew 250 attendees representing all of Montana's tribes, state, federal, and local government and regulatory agencies, financial institutions and other businesses.

Following the conference, 45 stakeholders met and unanimously voted to form a statewide alliance of organizations dedicated to promoting private sector business development in Indian Country, and MIBA was born. Subsequent meetings established an executive committee, work plans for 2006 and a mission statement and four objectives that MIBA would pursue.

The mission of MIBA is to promote private Indian business development by maximizing and developing resources that encourage and support Montana "Indianpreneurs". Indianpreneur is a term used by ONABEN, a Native-led nonprofit based in Oregon, to capture the experiences, challenges and opportunities Native entrepreneurs face in starting an owning a business.

The four objectives and teams

established to focus on them are:

- ▶ Be a proactive network and resource advocate for Indian Business (Resource Team);

- ▶ Be a catalyst for Indianpreneur growth and enhancement (Training Team);

- ▶ Promote successful Indian Country business environments (Business Environment Team);

- ▶ Foster accessibility and financial resources (Financial Resources Team)

"Together with many tribal, private, nonprofit, grassroots, state and federal organizations, we're working hard to reach out to all Montana Indians who have the qualities of an entrepreneur and the desire to own a business," Maria Valandra, MIBA Chairperson and vice president of community development at First Interstate Bank in Billings said. "Our goal is to make sure the resources they need are readily attainable and not out of reach."

MIBA welcomes those interested in helping further its mission of encouraging and supporting private business development in Montana's Indian Country. For more information visit <http://www.mibaonline.org>

Excerpted from *Community Dividend*, published by the Community Affairs Department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis www.minneapolisfed.org/pubs/cd

From Director Steve Galbavy

Over the next few months, the staff of Opportunity Link will be assisting residents within the seven PRO communities to organize and develop. In addition, Opportunity Link will be launching Study Circles in your community. Study Circles is a step-by-step organizing process that helps people hold productive conversations and work together to solve public problems and identify community assets. These assets enable us to utilize existing resources to leverage,

and network as a region to bring about real systemic change in lifting people out of poverty. We will be offering scholarships for people to be trained as facilitators in this process. I look forward to bringing more information to you about the Study Circles as details are confirmed.

As a grassroots effort, your input is critical to our success. I encourage you to stay involved with your local PRO's, and thank you for your continued support.

Congratulations to **Marlene Werk**, Executive Director of the Hays Community Economic Development Corporation and member of the Fort Belknap PRO. She is the recipient of a scholarship by the NeighborWorks Training Institute to attend the Native American Community Development Training Program in New Orleans December 11-15. The five-day event offers learning and educational sessions taught by a faculty of seasoned practitioners with extensive experience working in Native American Community Development. For more information about Neighborworks America visit www.nw.org/training



Executive Director Steve Galbavy
Photo by Helmbrecht Studio



Julia Doney, President, FBICC, Tescha Hawley of the Fort Belknap 4-7-7, and Opportunity Link Board Member Mary Ruth St. Pierre at the Coalition meeting.

Opportunity Link is committed to finding systemic ways to reduce poverty and help the communities of Northcentral Montana achieve independence, prosperity and a better way of life.

CONTACT US

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Coalition Meeting (continued from page 1)

generational scale,” said Goodwin. “NWAFF is trying to learn how to do poverty reduction, and what we know is that lessons are learned through the process of real people doing real work, taking on really difficult issues in their own communities.” Community Liaison Tony Looking Elk offered to participants that the PRO’s act as a lens to think about systemic change. “Think about the PRO’s as having the responsibility to be a lens, a lens to identify both the system and systemic change.”

Following lunch, Executive Director Steve Galbavy introduced the work plan for Opportunity Link. “Over the next six months, our focus will be to strengthen the organization, economic and transportation development,” Galbavy said. “It would be impossible to begin implementing all seven strategies at once as was originally thought,” he said. “We are not reducing the number of strategies in our overall work plan, but feel these areas represent an immediate need in our region.” Participants then broke into groups with other members of their PRO’s and worked to identify what work they could do in their communities to address the strategies. Progress on the identified tasks will be shared by both the local PRO groups and Opportunity Link at the next coalition meeting.

Race Conference (continued from page 2)

and Human Services, churches and non-profit organizations working toward building and strengthening Montana’s Race Relations.

Renewal education credits and Peace Officers’ Standards and Training (POST) credits are available. Please visit the conference website at www.montanaedu/wocheai/2006-RaceConference.html for agenda and registration information.

NEW ON THE OPPORTUNITY LINK WEBSITE!!

Local and Regional PRO members can now communicate online! The Opportunity Link website now offers a discussion forum, or ‘chat’ room, for users to talk about what’s happening in the PRO’s and stay informed about regional activities. To access this feature, go to the Opportunity Link home page at <http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org> and click on the Discussion Forum link to the left of “How to Get Involved”. From there click on “Register” and complete the process to join. Please contact the main office at 265-3699 for more information.

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