

## Message from **Ciro LoPinto**

Hello to All. I would like to thank everyone that helped me to manage the Presidency of the American Indian/Alaska Native Employees Association (AIANEA) during 2011. The year was a bit challenging for all of us. We lost two of our respected Elders. First we lost Leland Debe and then we lost Louis Dick. They will both be dearly missed and have contributed selflessly to the AIANEA for many years. We also did not have our yearly gathering, for the first time since our inception. It's kind of funny that I've served on every conference planning committee since 2001, then I don't get to "conduct" one as president...and the world never stopped turning...imagine that?



Please, let us look at our accomplishments. Not having a conference encouraged us to think and act more creatively. We held our first Association business meeting as a teleconference. The Association will be sending each participant a small thank you gift for participating. It will be a surprise. We seemed to have just as many participants as when we hold it live, and it probably took just as long. The only thing missing was the snacks.

The annual business meeting planning process produced the idea of holding Regional AIANEA Meetings/Trainings. We are encouraging all Regional representatives to begin exploring, with their regional members, the possibility of attending other meetings that are pertinent to our mission and then making time to meet as a group. We also thought about organizing small, overnight gatherings to exchange information and ideas. We believe the AIANEA can help to support the cost of such meetings. I would encourage everyone, when you have more than three AIANEA members in the same place, to hold a brief meeting, take some notes, and present some ideas to National Council. If you order a pizza, let us know and maybe we can help with the cost. Maybe I'm thinking a bit too far out of the pizza box, but you get my drift.

The AIANEA is also strongly considering the creation of a body of information that we, as AIANEA members, would be solely qualified to deliver to NRCS and our partners. The information could include such items as Tribal Consultation, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous Stewardship Methods. We should all be doing our best to make opportunities to distribute our knowledge and our message to others.

The AIANEA, with the help of the Office of Outreach and Advocacy, created the first survey to collect data regarding the skill sets of our American Indian/Alaska Native employees and their willingness to serve on a work detail with the Agency or the Department. The participating groups are busy compiling and evaluating the information to widely distribute.

The AIANEA has also begun a draft Memorandum of Understanding with the USDA, NRCS and the Office of Outreach and Advocacy. We will probably be asked, once again next year, to propose working agreements and projects to carry out with our focus groups. It's best not to wait until the last minute, so join this committee, which will be headed by our new 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Stacy Kimble from Michigan.

The AIANEA also joined the age of social media and now has a Facebook page. Please join us. The AIANEA has also distributed \$1000 worth of scholarships to deserving students. As a final note (but I am sure I've forgotten some of our accomplishments) we have also created an "Elders Memorial Scholarship Fund" to be used when people would like to donate wealth for the cause of remembering our past Elders.

Thank you all, once again, for a fun and interesting AIANEA Presidency in the year 2011. I will probably see you soon...on some committee or at a Regional gathering in 2012.

Respectfully,

Ciro Lo Pinto

AIANEA President, 2011