



American Indian/Alaska Native Employees Association for NRCS

“Respect, Harmony, and Beauty”

January 3, 2007

AIANEA Members and Friends of AIANEA:

As my term of President comes to a close, I wanted to let you know how things are going for the Association. I also want to tell you why I have improved faith in the strength of the Association and the opportunities it provides.

The AIANEA has evolved since almost 10 years ago when it began, becoming a cohesive network of NRCS (and other USDA agency) professionals from around the nation. Our Presidents, National Council, members, and Elders Council have helped to shape who we are now. We have achieved a strong sense of identity as employees who are proud to be Indigenous people or who want to learn more about the first Americans. We strive to share parts of our culture through the songs by our drum group; through our council of Elders who share their wisdom and guidance; and through the training we provide at our annual training conferences. The eagle staff (kept by Martin Bales, Tribal Liaison in Colville, Washington) is the Association flag. The medicine wheel (drawn by Dave Wise, Tribal College Liaison in Fond du Lac, Minnesota) is the Association logo. The hide which is currently in development (kept by Roylene Rides-at-the-Door in Warwick, RI) depicts each of our elders and their culture. The songs (given to us by Elder Norman Lopez from Towaoc, Colorado) are the Association songs.

We have a lot to be thankful for this past year.

- The AIANEA Scholarship fund continues to grow and evolve. Some visionary members have strategized innovative ways to bring in more dollars which will help students prepare for a career in natural resources. The Scholarship Committee Chair, Kurt Cates can provide more information on that or you can see our web site for more details: www.aianea.com.
- And speaking of our web site, it continues to flourish as well with a new look and more information. Web Master Yvette Dulle continues to do an excellent job with that!
- We held the first-ever joint NRCS employee association conference with the Asian Pacific Islander Organization in Anchorage, Alaska. I was proud to host the training conference in my home state and field office area. We have no complaints in working with APIO and I'd like to personally thank the entire joint planning committee for a job well-done. We received many compliments from our leaders at Headquarters and from across the nation.
- Each of the AIANEA Elders was able to attend this conference: Jerry Wolfe from Cherokee, NC; Billy Smith from McDavid, FL; Loretta Metoxin from Oneida, WI; Leland Debe from Cloquet, MN; Joe Joaquin from Sells, AZ; Norman Lopez from Towaoc, CO; Louie Dick from Cayuse, OR; and Marie Meade from Anchorage, AK.

We also have a lot to look forward to in 2007 and beyond. David Elliott is our incoming President and will help to guide and shape this Association. He has a good heart and a good mind, and he will lead us well. Our up and coming Presidents are Millie Titla in 2008 and Dave Wise in 2009. I believe they will also be great leaders. At our 2007 conference, we'll have a visioning process so that you can help us determine how we can better

help you. How can we help NRCS accomplish better outreach to Indian and Alaska Native landowners? How can we recruit more Indian and Alaska Native employees and help them through to their career goals? How can we be better at assisting our members?

As for me, I have a lot to be thankful for. You elected me in 2003 to be the 2004 2nd Vice President when I was 26 years old. Now as I turn 30 I feel this Association has helped to shape me into a more informed employee, a more confident professional and a stronger leader. Without this Association I would not have grown this way. I want to thank each and every one of you for your support. We hold each other up high. And I want to thank my husband Ed, and daughter Audrey, for their patience and love. I'm glad they are good listeners.

I believe wholeheartedly that this and the other employee associations strengthen the NRCS work force through leadership development, cultural diversity recruitment, and technical and cultural training. Because of that, I want to encourage you to run for a leadership position in the future or volunteer for a committee or just simply check the web site from time to time. Be involved, learn, grow, do good things.

Sincerely,



Crystal Leonetti, President 2006