

## BUSINESS



*Facebook/SUCAP*

*Southern Ute Community Action Programs, Inc. is one of the largest nonprofits in western Colorado. Its youth services division fosters development through outdoor adventure and community service.*

## Hot List: Native Businesses

By Lynn Armitage

Many tribes and Native-owned businesses are getting rich the old-fashioned way: through ingenuity and hard work. A little support from the Native community doesn't hurt, either. Here are some Native businesses that are going strong and continue to provide much-needed products and services to Indian country:

### Woman on a Mission

**Kauffman & Associates, Inc.** (KAI) was launched in 1990 by Jo Ann Kauffman, a member of the Nez Perce Indian Tribe. What started as a one-woman operation has grown into a 65-member non-profit organization over the last 25 years, with offices in both Washingtons—Spokane and D.C. KAI specializes in helping

government and commercial organizations realize their goals and affect positive change. Kauffman and her team are keeping very busy these days, with more than 40 active clients spanning many industry sectors, including education, health and economic development.

### **‘We Mean Business for Indian Country’**

That’s the motto for the **National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development** (NCAIED), a Native-owned organization that has helped tribes and Native entrepreneurs become successful in business for nearly 40 years. With seven offices across the country, NCAIED works closely with 80 percent of the tribes in Indian country, and is well-known for its annual business awards, signature business events, such as Res, and its job portal, **Native Edge**.

### **Insurance Reassurance**

Looking for business insurance? **AMERIND Risk** has you covered. Founded 30 years ago by more than 400 tribes, it is the only 100 percent tribally-owned and operated insurance solutions provider in Indian country. Whatever your business needs—employee benefits, liability and workers’ compensation insurance or property coverage—AMERIND reminds you it is all about “tribes protecting tribes” and keeping tribal dollars within Indian country.



*Courtesy AMERIND Risk*

*Derek Valdo, AMERIND Risk CEO*

## **Asset Builders**

**First Nations Oweesta Corporation** is helping Natives build wealth. It helps communities create their own asset-building products and services, such as banks, loan funds and credit unions. Oweesta, a Mohawk word for money, specifically provides training, technical assistance, investments, research and policy advocacy.

## **Lifting Up Pine Ridge**

**Lakota Funds** is on a mission to lift the Oglala Lakota out of poverty by helping to grow businesses on the Pine Ridge Reservation. It started in 1986 with \$500 loans to two Native American-owned businesses and has grown into a \$7 million portfolio with maximum loan amounts up to \$300,000. To date, Lakota Funds has created more than 1,400 jobs and helped launch hundreds of enterprises.

## A Beacon in the Pacific Northwest

**Lummi Community Development Financial Institution** (LCDFI) is a welcome friend to entrepreneurs of the 4,790-member Lummi Nation. Founded in 2006, LCDFI aims to create jobs and economic opportunity for the Lummi and surrounding communities through small business training, entrepreneur education, business coaching, resource referrals and financial literacy.

## The Ho-Chunk's Big Ideas

Besides its profitable gaming operations in six cities in Wisconsin, the **Ho-Chunk Nation** holds business interests in a number of other industries, including lodging, recreation, retail, sales and manufacturing. They even own an RV resort and campground near the Wisconsin Dells, a popular tourist attraction. The tribe is currently working with the city of Madison to develop its really big idea—a sporting event complex featuring indoor and outdoor playing fields, a cultural center that spotlights the rich history of the Ho-Chunk people, a hotel, parking structure and possibly a conference center, too.



*Courtesy Ho-Chunk*

*The Ho-Chunk Nation's planned Sports Complex and Cultural Center*

## A-OK in Choctaw Country

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma manages a dazzling array of businesses, providing more than 5,000 jobs. Its business portfolio includes 20 gaming sites, two resorts plus a third under construction, six hotels, a KOA RV park, six restaurant franchises including two Chili's, three retail stores, a multi-million dollar printing company, 14 travel plazas plus two under construction, 12 ranches and farms encompassing 65,000 acres where they manage 2,100 cattle and harvest 130,000 pounds of pecans, and its latest prize—the Choctaw Country Market scheduled to open this August. In total, the **Choctaw Nation Division of Commerce** rakes in hundreds of millions of dollars a year to help support vital programs and services for its tribal members

### **Rocky Mountain Highs**

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe is involved in a flurry of business operations on and off the reservation that generate millions of dollars each year, making it the largest employer in Colorado's La Plata County. Besides the **Sky Ute Casino and Resort**, the tribe also owns **KSUT public radio**, the **Southern Ute Community Action Programs, Inc.**—one of the largest nonprofits in western Colorado—and a number of businesses in oil and gas production, natural gas gathering, real estate development and housing construction. To help make all this enterprise possible, the tribe started the **Southern Ute Indian Tribe Growth Fund** in 2000. The fund's rapid growth has allowed the tribe to spread its operations and assets over 14 states and the Gulf of Mexico.

### **Meaty Profits**

KivaSun Foods, founded in 2010 by Native golf pro Notah Begay III, is a wholesaler of fresh and frozen bison steaks, bison burgers, bison dogs, bison chili and bison jerky—the latest extension to its product line. Natives have relied on bison for nutritional and spiritual sustenance for ages, and it's a lower-fat, higher-protein alternative to beef. Last year, KivaSun won a USDA contract to provide 520,000 pounds of bison for inclusion in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). The company also distributes through commercial retail clients, such as Costco and Walmart. Its motto is: Respect the land. Revere the food. Gather together.





*KivaSun Foods*

*KivaSun Foods Hatch Chile*

**Liquid Gold**

Two brothers found a way to tackle food insecurity on the rez and conserve precious water, too. In 2012, Kaben and Shelby Smallwood, Choctaw, founded **Symbiotic Aquaponic, LLC**, a company that builds customized aquaponic farming systems. The company has grown tremendously, and now offers four standardized backyard systems – either for installation or shipping. Aquaponics, a nontraditional form of agriculture dating back to Aztecan and Far Eastern cultures, uses a recirculating water system to symbiotically raise fish and produce, requiring just one-tenth to one-one-hundredth of the water used in traditional agriculture. Symbiotic has worked closely with many tribes, including the Seminole, Choctaw, Cheyenne and Arapahoe, building aquaponic systems throughout Indian country and educating people about this unique way to grow food. The company recently finished a commercial project at Redlands Community College in Cheyenne-Arapaho territory. The building is allowing the students to do research and implement aquaponics as an economic tool for their program.



*Facebook/Aquaponic, LLC*

*Aquaponics is a form of nontraditional agriculture that utilizes a recirculating water system to symbiotically raise fish and produce.*

## Chocolate Heaven

The Chickasaw Nation is savoring sweet success with **Bedré Fine Chocolates**, a chocolate-making company it purchased in 2000 from a local entrepreneur, becoming the only Native American tribe to manufacture chocolates. Over the last 16 years, Bedré—a Norwegian word meaning “better”—has grown into a profitable chocolate-making and selling machine, producing delicious confections such as chocolate bars, crisps, clusters, meltaways—and chocolate soda and coffee, too. A few years ago, the operation was moved into a 34,600-square-foot, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Davis, Oklahoma. The chocolates are sold online and through nearly 100 retail locations throughout the U.S., including the Bedré Café, a one-of-a kind coffee bar, candy store, sandwich shop and confectionary inside the Chickasaw-owned Artesian Hotel in Sulphur, Oklahoma.





*Bedré Fine Chocolate*