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Contact: Heidi Cuny, 415.279.0185, heidi@cunycommunications.com

Social Enterprise Café Builds Life Skills of Reservation Youth

Eagle Butte, South Dakota – August 1, 2014 – To the residents of the Cheyenne River Reservation, the newly-opened Keya Café & Coffee Shop in Eagle Butte, South Dakota is a great place to pick up a cup of coffee and a pastry in the morning. But behind the scenes, this small business is working on a much broader scope by addressing such issues as the environment, job creation, diabetes, and youth life skills.

Opened in January by the Cheyenne River Youth Project, a nonprofit organization that has spent the last 25 years offering youth programs and family services that foster healthy choices and life practices, the Keya Café has created a handful of jobs in an area where unemployment is estimated to be as high as 80% by some sources. In addition, the café will have provided a unique internship experience to over 30 youth by the end of summer. Local youth must apply and interview in a competitive selection process in order to participate in the internship program where they work for 60 hours to receive \$500, as well as training in food handling, customer service, safety, and financial literacy.

“These kids become baristas and learn practical skills that can help them to get a job when they go off to college. Plus, it feels good to earn money,” says Julie Garreau, Executive Director of the Cheyenne River Youth Project, who leveraged their nonprofit status and funding to launch the business. Garreau says it was a waitressing experience from her youth that was the stimulus for the Keya Café. “I thought I was too shy to be a waitress, but it forces you to meet people and talk to people. It just brings you out of your shell,” she says.

Garreau says the internship program has been very successful so far with participants showing up for their scheduled shifts early and meeting all dress code and hygiene requirements. “We’re raising the bar, and the kids are rising to the occasion. They have to perform and we’re not letting anyone off the hook,” she says. The staff is also seeing how the internship experience is impacting youth’s lives outside of the program. One boy who completed the internship used his money to buy a lawnmower and is now making more money by mowing lawns in the area.

While the Keya Café is generating income to increase the long-term sustainability of the Cheyenne River Youth Project’s programs, it is also playing an important role in the community. A significant portion of the food on the menu is supplied by the 2-acre naturally-grown and pesticide-free community garden that is operated by the youth project and countless volunteers. Not only does the garden employ environmentally friendly practices, but it also stands to promote Native American food sovereignty and the importance of traditional Lakota food. Increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables has also been used as a way to fight epidemic rates of diabetes in Native American populations. A good portion of the harvest is frozen,

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dehydrated, or canned so that it can be used through the winter and until the next growing season. The quality produce contributes to the exclusive, yet healthy menu items at Keya Café such as homemade salsa, curried chicken salad, and wild grape cheesecake bars.

Located in a rural and isolated area, the Keya Café serves as a gathering place for the residents of the Cheyenne River Reservation. “It’s another dining option for the community. There is not another coffee shop like this one in town,” says Garreau. The café can handle groups of up to 100 people, and recently catered a networking luncheon that was co-hosted by the South Dakota Indian Business Alliance and Four Bands Community Fund, groups that are dedicated to promoting strategies that support Indian business development. Stacey LaCompte, the Alliance’s Project Manager, says, “The atmosphere and the food at the Keya Café were excellent, and the interns did an excellent job. I was totally impressed by their customer service.” LaCompte says she and the other luncheon attendees appreciated how traditional Lakota foods were incorporated into the menu.

By incorporating economic, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability practices into its business model, the Keya Café has achieved the quadruple bottom line, a measure of performance recently cited by *Forbes* as a way to determine the true effectiveness of an organization. Although Garreau states its primary purpose is “for the kids to learn about what it is to work and what it means to be a good employee,” the Keya Café is impacting the Cheyenne River Reservation on many different levels. This social enterprising coffee shop isn’t just making espressos and chicken wraps. The Keya Café is building up a workforce in an area that is struggling to rediscover self-sufficiency. It is raising the bar on business practices in a fledgling economy. It is encouraging healthy eating habits in a population that suffers from high rates of diabetes and other health issues. And the Keya Café is inspiring local residents to embrace their Lakota culture so they can carry it proudly into positions of responsibility and authority in their own community as well as in the wider society.

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About the South Dakota Indian Business Alliance

The South Dakota Indian Business Alliance (SDIBA) was formed in 2007 to cultivate effective and efficient business environments in South Dakota's Indian Country. The mission of SDIBA is to enhance Indian business development by leveraging partnerships and resources of diverse institutions and organizations. In addition, SDIBA collaborates with partner organizations to maximize the benefits of joint efforts by the state and the tribes to increase Indian entrepreneurship in South Dakota. SDIBA uses a comprehensive business development model that addresses governance, infrastructure, finance, and resources in order to develop sustainable businesses in Indian Country. More information can be found on SDIBA’s website at www.sdibaonline.org.