

## **Tribal Students Honored at Interior Awards Ceremony**

*By Walter Bonora*

Science and engineering teams representing two tribal colleges and one high school were recently honored for their winning designs at a ceremony at the Department of Interior in Washington D.C. Held in April, students from College of Menominee Nation in Keshena, Wisc., Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute from Albuquerque, N.M., and Oneida Nation High School from Oneida, Wisc., were honored for building efficient wind turbines as part of the 2010 Indian Student Renewable Energy Challenge. The event, the first of its kind, was co-sponsored by the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development (IEED), The Bureau of Indian Education, and Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory.

"Finding unique and stimulating ways for students to translate their classroom learning to the real world is a key to developing our future scientists in Indian Country," said Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. "In a few years, these students will be leaders in developing renewable energy resources for their tribes and the reservation economies."

The challenge was a two-part contest. In Phase I, student teams organized by the schools were asked to submit designs for a portable wind turbine installation that generated energy, stored it mechanically or electronically and then used the stored energy to power light emitting diodes. The best 10 designs (five high schools and five tribal colleges) were selected in fall 2009, and those teams each received \$1,300 to construct a prototype for Phase II. A panel of judges chose the winners based on their final constructed models and submitted videos.

Dean Davis, leader of the College of Menominee Nation team, saw the challenge as an opportunity to work on a new and innovative project. "This challenge gave us a chance to really push the envelope and develop a new design. Renewable energy development is important for our tribe and for the country."

The Energy Challenge underscores a larger IEED effort designed to train and prepare Indian youth for today's economy. Among the numerous training programs and initiatives IEED sponsors are: an ongoing partnership with Colorado's School of Mines, where IEED staff and college faculty develop energy engineering courses for teachers at tribal colleges to use in their respective science and engineering curricula; National Iron Workers Training Program for American Indians; a summer camp on the University of Arizona campus in Tucson designed to teach Indian students the ins and outs of small business development, and a summer internship program with Argonne where Indian and Alaska Native students study renewable and non-renewable energy resource development and how that development may impact the environment.

"Energy development is an important tool for developing tribal economies," said Bob Middleton, director of the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development, "and we believe our youth initiatives, including the energy challenge, will help develop the assets that tribes and tribal governments need to successfully manage future renewable energy projects. We need to look towards native youth as the foundation for future success in economic development in Indian Country."

