Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ross Swimmer today awarded contracts to three firms that will act as model business development centers to create jobs for Indian tribes and individuals.

The three corporations, selected from 21 applicants, are the United Indian Development Association (UIDA) of El Monte, California; The Rensselaerville Institute of Rensselaerville, New York, and the Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) of Fairbanks, Alaska

Swimmer said, "Indian leaders have told me business development is their number one need. The creation of these centers is an effort to fulfill that need and is a positive step toward economic development in Indian Country. These firms are committed to producing real jobs, businesses and revenues."

Each firm was awarded $250,000 to generate jobs in Indian Country by attracting industry to the reservations and helping entrepreneurs start and run new businesses. The contractors, each experienced with Indian economic development, will assist business in planning, financing, accounting, marketing and management assistance from start-up until the business is successfully established.

The firms are proposing to create 1,081 jobs in Indian Country over a three-year period. The one-year contracts are renewable for up to three years if the firms meet the job creation numbers called for in their contracts.

"We've been through a multitude of studies that have told us what the problems are in Indian Country," Swimmer said. "We tend to deal too much with the problem side and not enough with getting the job done. We know the problems are there. The emphasis of these centers will be to create jobs."

About half of the nation's 1.4 million Indians live on reservations. Their land holdings total more than 53 million acres where1 unemployment runs as high as 70 percent on some reservations. One-quarter of the Indian workforce is seeking employment and 27 percent of the total population lives below the poverty line. The Rensselaerville Institute, headed by president Harold S. Williams, is a non-profit development corporation that has been creating jobs and building housing and community infrastructure since 1972. Its staff of consultants will support local entrepreneurs as well as import prospective businessmen to the reservations.

UIDA, a 16-year-old non-profit corporation under the leadership of president Steven L.A. Stallings, will establish a regional center in El Monte CA., and eventually in Denver and Seattle. These centers will help begin or expand at least five Indian businesses and create jobs for Indian workers.

Nearly 350 Indian businesses have started or expanded as a result of UIDA. The consulting group has raised more than $7 million in capital for Indian businesses and created nearly 2,000 jobs. The Fairbanks Native Association, founded in 1967 and headed by a seven-member board of directors, is the only contract that will focus on a single state - Alaska. FNA plans to establish a separate development center that will become self-supporting within three years. During its 26-year history, FHA has

established or expanded businesses in tourism, logging and other industries. It has landed major loan packages for clients and set up a Small Business Assistance Center. Tribes or businesses interested in contacting the new business development centers should write to the following addresses: Rensselaerville Institute, Pond Hill Road, Rensselaerville, HY 12147; United Indian Development Association, 9650 Flair Drive, Suite 303, El Monte, CA. 91731; Fairbanks Native Association, 310 1st Avenue, Fairbanks, AK. 99701.