Strengthening tribal economies through education, technology and entrepreneurship

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WASHINGTON – Bureau of Indian Affairs Director W. Patrick Ragsdale today announced that the BIA Great Plains Regional Office in Aberdeen, S.D., will hold the 7th Annual Great Plains Tribal/Federal Economic Development Summit next month with the theme "Empowering and Strengthening Economic Development in Indian Country Through: Education, Technology and Entrepreneurship." The summit, which will be held May 9-12, 2005, at the Dakota Magic Casino and Hotel in Hankinson, N.D., is expected to draw 500 attendees from tribes, businesses and state and federal agencies from the Northern Plains and Midwest.

"The BIA Great Plains Tribal/Federal Economic Development Summit is an exciting and highly informative venue for doing business in Indian Country," Ragsdale said. "For six years this event has successfully carried out the BIA's mission to promote economic opportunity for tribes, and I anticipate this year's summit will continue that trend."

While its focus remains on business development, information technology, infrastructure development, tourism, agriculture, natural resources and energy, the 2005 summit agenda includes a new education component designed for small business owners and American Indian students in high school and college business programs.

"We have noted great interest in the BIA Great Plains Tribal/Federal Economic Development Summit from tribal and business leaders from around the region," said Great Plains Regional Director William Benjamin.

"The education component we have added will help train future Indian business leaders and promote the entrepreneurial spirit that lives in Indian Country." The education component will address the needs of Indian entrepreneurs by providing attendees with opportunities to discuss start-up financing, marketing strategies, business plan development, contracting and other small business topics with representatives from state and federal agencies, private industry and academia. Representatives from the University of South Dakota Small Business Development Center and the United Tribes Technical College of Bismarck, N.D., will be on hand to assist entrepreneurs with their business plans.

The student program will include a business plan competition where finalists will present their submissions at the conference before a select group of American Indian business leaders and owners, and representatives of youth business groups Junior Achievement of South Dakota and Future Business Leaders of America. The winners will be announced at the summit's banquet on May 12.

Also continued this year is the trade show component which showcases a variety of American Indian businesses and allows attendees to interface with business-focused federal and state programs.

Among the featured speakers from the tribal, public and private sectors will be David W. Anderson, former Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs and founder and former chairman of Famous Dave's of America, Inc., and Diane L. Cullo, Executive Director, White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities, U.S. Department of Education. In addition, Brian Burns, Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management and Chief Information Officer – Indian Affairs and Dr. Bob Middleton, Director, DOI Office of Indian Energy Resource Development, will join other representatives from the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs and the BIA as speakers and panelists.

For more information on the 7th Annual Great Plains Tribal/Federal Economic Development Summit, contact Onna LeBeau in the BIA Great Plains Regional Office Branch of Economic Development at 605-226-7381 or onnalebeau@netscape.net.