

Rural Development • Rural Business Program • RBOG

Native Artists Enhance Community Economic Development

Because of the enduring impact of traditional arts and culture, both on and off reservations, Native artists represent an important yet undervalued asset for enhancing community economic development and creating stronger Indian nations and families.

Rural Development awarded First Peoples Fund a \$98,000 Rural Business Opportunity Grant for advanced technical assistance to Native American artists in a five state area. The purpose of this project is unique as it will combine targeting and in depth training and technical assistance with a working capital grant to Native artists to help them grow and expand their arts businesses which, in turn, will contribute to a sustainable future for the artists, their families and their communities.



Brendon Albers working on his art projects. Photo courtesy of First Peoples Fund.

Once this project is completed, Rural Development will have helped the expansion of 18 Native-owned businesses; the creation/ retention of 19 jobs; and increased sales, revenue and market exposure resulting in more self-sufficient and successful artists. Additionally, the project has a positive effect on the economy of the artists' rural Reservations, especially in areas where tourism is a prime industry as arts and culture play a significant role in attracting people to visit Native communities. Rural Development is investing in not only individual artists, but in entire communities as well.

Brendon Albers (Cheyenne River Sioux) lives on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Brendon is a self-taught sculptor with a great desire to learn more. Brendon makes small to medium scale pieces primarily out of alabaster and other stone. Master sculptor, Sean Depasquale Mckibben who specializes in large-scale sculptures, came to Pine Ridge to train Brendon in making the transition into larger pieces as well as making casts of originals. Hands on training right in his studio afforded Brendon the opportunity to work with different styles in expanding his business. Sean shared his expertise in 'stepping out of your comfort zone' and dealing effectively with the business world. Brendon is now working on a plan to get his pieces to New York. "Realizing my art and making money are two different things...I am now able to find a happy medium in making money and still feeling good about bringing special gifts to whoever purchases my pieces."

Brendon also needed financial guidance and training. He utilized business coach, Kim Tilsen Brave Heart to help keep his financial records in order. Brendon received training on conducting professional presentations, art show prep, applying for grants, taxes, public speaking, financial budgeting and capitalizing on social media for his business. Brendon has new confidence in his abilities to expand his sculpting business to a higher level of expertise as well as handle financial business matters on his own. He foresees these two aspects of training received through USDA, to greatly impact his business for years to come, both financially and professionally.

Obligation Amount: \$98,000 RBOG

Date of Obligation: 09/25/2014

Congressional District: At Large, Senator Thune, Senator Rounds, and Congresswoman Noem

Partners: First Peoples Fund and USDA Rural Development

Demographics: Rapid City, SD - the project has a positive effect on the economy of the artists' rural Reservations, especially in areas where tourism is a prime industry as arts and culture play a significant role in attracting people to visit Native communities.

Impact: Once this project is completed, Rural Development will have helped the expansion of 18 Native-owned businesses; the creation/ retention of 19 jobs; and increased sales, revenue and market exposure resulting in more self-sufficient and successful artists.