

SHCJ Invests in Model Non-profit in Taos, New Mexico

Taos County Economic Development Corporation was begun almost 30 years ago by Terri Bad Hand and Patty Martinson, two creative young social workers of Native American ancestry. They came to Taos seeking solutions to the widespread poverty and unemployment of New Mexico, the poorest State in the Nation.

Their purpose for the organization is to provide support services for small businesses and to develop alternatives to structural poverty, dead-end jobs and unemployment. The target population is low-income and minority clients, 75% of whom are low-income, 40% Native American, 60% Hispanic and 50% female.

The Corporation accomplishes its purpose through development of programs that address the needs and employ the talents of the population served. They purposely foster the culture, arts and traditional foods of the minorities represented.

Current programs include a Business Incubator where over 350 small businesses have been launched; a Business Park for training and education; a Food Center where many small businesses have begun in its commercial kitchen; a Matanza or meat processing unit that enables small ranchers to raise, process and distribute their organic meat products; a Community Garden where clients learn to raise food for themselves and for distribution; Green Houses where disabled Veterans work to raise food and for gardening therapy; A Farm Market Stand to sell produce they raise and meat products from small ranchers of the locale; An Arts Center where budding artists create and sell their art pieces.

Over the years the non-profit has received funding from both government and private foundations. Several years ago they applied for and received funding from the SHCJ Community Development Investment Program which provides loans to organizations working to alleviate poverty. These loans have helped their programs to continue, especially during the economic downturn.

During the economic lean years, when many non-profits of the area were forced to close, the two co-directors did not receive salaries. Instead, they became as poor as those they serve and received unemployment compensation for the support of their families.

Patty and Terri, the devoted Executive Directors, are hoping for better times when they can give up their leadership roles to younger, energetic people and continue to do the creative work that will make best use of their energy and enthusiasm. They are deeply grateful for the SHCJ funding that has helped keep their excellent ministry alive in the Taos area where they continue to serve so many of the low-income population.

