

Honoring Nations Award 2000

Poeh Cultural Center and Museum

Pueblo of Pojoaque

Faced with a challenge common to many Indian and non-Indian arts organizations, the Pueblo of Pojoaque created the for-profit Pojoaque Pueblo Construction Services Corporation in 1993 specifically to generate revenues for, and to oversee the construction and maintenance of, the Pueblo's non-profit Poeh Cultural Center and Museum. By blending cultural revitalization and economic development into a unique partnership, the Pueblo is creating new revenues and employment opportunities through its construction company. It is also providing a sustainable funding stream for cultural and artistic activities, and regaining control over its cultural future.

Located in northern New Mexico, the Pueblo of Pojoaque is known as Po-suwae-geh, or "Water-drinking place" in the Native Tewa language. Traditionally considered the cultural hub for the Tewa people, Pojoaque was a place for travelers to stop and drink water where three local rivers met. It is also a place known widely for its rich cultural and artistic tradition. Pojoaque artists have always been recognized as producers of exquisite polychrome pottery, stone carving and basket making. Indeed, artistic expression is of central importance to Pueblo history. Pojoaque citizens have traditionally relied on art as a cultural staple, to serve utilitarian and ceremonial needs, and, more recently to create employment.

Pojoaque's cultural and traditional legacies have faced serious challenges throughout history. The combined consequences of small pox, Spanish conquest, lack of water and a diminished land base reduced Pojoaque's population to a mere 20 citizens by the end of the nineteenth century. As Pueblo citizens fled their homelands, its feasts and dances went into hibernation, and its unique art techniques became threatened by extinction. In the 1930s, several families returned to Pojoaque and the Pueblo received permanent federal recognition, as part of the Indian Reorganization Act. This sparked a political, economic and cultural resurgence, which gained momentum in subsequent decades. The Pueblo's revival accelerated in 1973 with the rebuilding of the traditional Kiva and the reintroduction of ceremonial dances after over 100 years of dormancy. Its leaders vowed to return economic prosperity and cultural health back to the people.

By the 1980s, art and culture became important vehicles for Pojoaque to advance its self-determination – and it established the Poeh Cultural Center in 1988. With nearly 900 artists and artisans living among the eight northern Pueblos, the Center provided a space where artists could display and sell their work. In 1990, Pojoaque established an educational division, Poeh Arts, to teach traditional Pueblo arts forms and to provide artists with the necessary marketing skills to achieve greater economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. Soon, the non-profit Poeh Center became the focal point for cultural preservation and revitalization within the Tewa and Tiwa-speaking communities. Backed by community support and encouraged by the early success of the Poeh Center, Pojoaque's leadership embraced the vision of constructing an educational complex and major museum to be designed and operated by Pueblo people and based upon Pueblo beliefs and perspectives.

As a first step, the Poeh Center opened a temporary museum in a 1,200 square foot storefront and began seeking ways to build and fund a permanent venue which could house all of the Center's programming, including a state-of-the-art museum, archives, classrooms and studio space. The Center quickly discovered that making this dream a reality would not be easy. Specifically, it encountered a challenge familiar to art and cultural institutions everywhere – obtaining the funding necessary for art facilities construction and operation. The majority of federal, state and private funding sources that support the arts and humanities tend to offer funding for programs, rather than for construction and maintenance of arts facilities.

As a result, the Pueblo considered ways to combine cultural preservation and economic development into a mutually beneficial relationship. Pojoaque's solution exemplifies creative and pragmatic vision.

In 1993, the Tribal Council created and incorporated the Pojoaque Pueblo Construction Services Corporation (PPCSC), using a two-year grant from the Administration for Native Americans for start up costs. The tribally owned construction company was chartered to work on a variety of commercial

construction projects throughout New Mexico, and to utilize the profits from these projects for the construction and on-going maintenance of the Poeh Center's facilities. The tribal resolution that chartered the corporation states that PPCSC's purposes are to *"garner revenues and allocate thirty-five percent of the total net profits from such revenues to cultural activities including, but not limited to, the Pojoaque Pueblo Cultural Center and Museum and development of a traditional Tewa cultural center."*

This unique cross-sector collaboration has been successful on many fronts. First, consistent with its original goal, the fiscal partnership provides the Poeh Center with a sustainable revenue stream. PPCSC has given the Center \$30,000 to start an endowment. The Center now receives about \$85,000 per year, which it is using to build a new museum that will open in 2002. These PPCSC generated monies – combined with the subsequently obtained matching funds, private funding and direct Tribal investment – have placed the Poeh Center in good financial health. With PPCSC's growing number of contracts and geographic scope, the Center stands to receive substantial on-going support. Equally important, as a construction company that specializes in adobe structures, the PPCSC is building and expanding the Center and its museum, which it does without charging administrative fees or taking a profit. Since 1993, PPCSC has contributed over \$300,000 in construction services, virtually eliminating the need for outside construction support. The synergistic relationship between the Poeh Center and PPCSC does not end there, however, as the corporation's leadership believes that working on the Center has led to increased demand for PPCSC's services elsewhere.

Second, from a business development standpoint, the Pueblo's creation of PPCSC is impressive. While the PPCSC was created specifically to direct 35% of its profits to the Poeh Center and other cultural activities, it has grown into much more. The Pueblo-owned corporation was built debt-free, is Native operated and governed, and is incorporated by the Pueblo as a New Mexico corporation under foreign corporation status. In its early years, PPCSC obtained contracts to construct public facilities and roads at Pojoaque; eventually it began serving the other seven northern Pueblos. As the second tribal corporation in New Mexico to receive its 8(a) certification from the Small Business Administration, PPCSC bids on construction projects throughout the state. With 26 construction projects under its belt – which have earned \$8.3 million – PPCSC currently has (as of January 2001) seven new projects valued at \$3.3 million. It employs one tribal member full-time, but possesses a 13-member base crew and maintains up to a 63-member crew (stet) for construction projects. Additionally, PPCSC has taught 24 residents how to build their own adobe homes and has recently been granted funding to teach seven young apprentices. Clearly, PPCSC seeks much more than profit generation and is constantly looking for ways to improve the livelihood of residents of the Pueblo of Pojoaque.

Third, from an educational and cultural preservation standpoint, the win-win relationship between the Poeh Center and PPCSC has had remarkable payoffs. The 26,500 square foot Poeh Center is traditionally constructed, yet possesses the latest in technology, from T1 computer lines to state-of-the-art ventilation systems and art repositories. The Center's classrooms attract hundreds of students and its instructors provide tutelage in ancient and modern techniques as well as computer skills. Students at the Poeh Center can receive academic credit through a partnership with Northern New Mexico Community College and marketing advice from the Center's instructors. Further, the Center brings in children from local schools and the Pueblo's Boys and Girls Club to learn about and create art. The Center also provides meeting and classroom space for other Native American arts and educational organizations.

Finally, the Pueblo of Pojoaque's business and cultural investments are transforming the community. Not only does the Poeh Center serve as the repository for sacred object repatriation among the Eight Northern Pueblos, but it is also rebuilding family and community ties. Community members share great pride in Pojoaque's commitment to the arts and for the opportunities the Poeh Center gives them to express their culture, to gain additional training, and in some cases, even launch careers. More importantly, the Poeh Center is educating the wider community about Pueblo culture, and its new museum has an anticipated annual audience of 45,000 visitors, plus an unlimited worldwide virtual audience through its on-line exhibits and collections.

In short, the Poeh Cultural Center and Museum have become what countless Pueblo citizens could only once dream of: a veritable showcase of Tewa culture and history, blending past and present architecture into a facility that now represents a cultural hub of the Eight Northern Pueblos. This dream became a reality because of the Pueblo of Pojoaque's strategic establishment of PPCSC – a corporation that meets the construction needs of the community and the state, serves as an important source of employment

and profit, and embraces a socially responsible mission that benefits Pojoaque, other Pueblos and their non-Indian visitors. Indeed, the sheer number of accomplishments that stem from this cross-sector partnership is inspiring.

For other American Indian nations, the Poeh Center's partnership with PPCSC serves as an instructive model in a number of ways. Notably, the partnership has effectively addressed a challenge familiar to art or cultural institutions everywhere – obtaining the funding necessary for facilities construction and maintenance. Rather than giving up on their vision, or continue fighting an uphill battle to find private or public funds to undertake museum construction and maintenance, the Pueblo looked within itself for an innovative solution. In addition, the partnership provides a vivid example of how economic development and cultural revitalization can work together. Throughout Indian Country, the 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a swell in the number of tribally chartered corporations; likewise, a growing number of tribes are actively pursuing the creation or expansion of nonprofit cultural centers and museums. Few tribes, however, have integrated economic development and cultural revitalization as explicitly – or as successfully – as the Pueblo of Pojoaque.

Importantly, the experience of Pojoaque also demonstrates how the arts can serve as the vehicle for advancing self-determination and education. The Pueblo is cultivating new generations of artists skilled in ancient techniques and trained in modern technologies. These artists are showcasing their culture in ways that the community finds appropriate. They are also building greater knowledge and appreciation of the important contributions Pueblo people have made throughout history. Through these efforts, Pojoaque has seized control of its cultural future, thereby advancing its self-determination. The importance of cultural self-determination is particularly pronounced given the dark history of federal policies of assimilation and acculturation, which ravaged many Native cultures, resulting in the loss of many Native languages, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge. In stark contrast to this dark history, the Poeh Center is now the focal point of cultural revitalization and, as such, it plays a central role in building the positive social, economic and cultural environment that its citizens and the surrounding communities can be proud of.

Lessons:

- Cross-sector collaboration is at the cutting edge of governing, and tribes should seek win-win partnerships between the public and nonprofit sectors. Such partnerships can prove instrumental for art and cultural institutions that often have difficulty obtaining funding for facility construction.
- Economic development and cultural revitalization can work hand-in-hand. Tribal governments have the ability to charter corporations that have both a profit motive and a social responsibility.
- Cultural preservation and revitalization are important expressions of self-determination. Tribally owned and operated museums, cultural centers, and art institutions maximize a tribe's ability to present its culture in ways it finds most appropriate.