

# PARTICIPANTS AWARD LUNCHEON

Wednesday, April 17, 2019



**Outstanding Participants**

**Outstanding Employers**

WIOA Section 166 and P.L. 102-477



## Alice Bigpond Roach Memorial Scholarship

Alice served as the Chairperson of the National Indian and Native American Employment and Training Conference (NINAETC) held in San Diego, California in 1992. The Participant Awards Luncheon exists today due to Alice's tenacity during a NINAETC Planning Committee meeting for the 1989 NINAETC in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Alice felt that our work in the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration centered on building a strong Native American workforce and we should recognize the individuals in our programs. After a healthy debate, the Committee agreed to incorporate the Participant Recognition.

## Howard Yackus Memorial Scholarship

Howard was an active supporter in the early years of the Southern California Indian Center, Inc., then known as the Orange County Indian Center (OCIC). Howard was always at fund raising events to support cultural activities like the Annual OCIC Powwow. After OCIC incorporated and captured its first Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) grant. Mr. Yackus was tasked by the OCIC Board to manage the new grant and became the director of the OCIC Manpower Development Program. Howard Yackus served his people all his adult life in both work and play. He was a role model to many and mentored numerous young Indian people and remained active all his life. Howard left us too soon and tragically. On Sunday August 31st, 1986 while attending a Pow-wow at the Barona Indian Reservation, Howard returned home to Cerritos to golf with plans to return to the Pow-wow that evening. That day was the day that Howard and his new family were lost to us as an Aeromexico jet crashed into his home.





**WIOA Section 166 Outstanding Participant**  
*Nominated by the Inter-Tribal Council of Louisiana*

**CHARLES STRANGE**

*Jena Band of Choctaw Indians*



I'm a 22-year-old tribal member of the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians. I enrolled in the Summer Youth Program at the age of 16 with the Inter-Tribal Council of Louisiana. I was placed at different summer and in-school positions throughout my high school days. When I began college, I reached out to my field service representative seeking assistance with finding a part-time job that would work around my school hours. I was struggling to find a job on my own. She placed me with the Alexandria Zoo in Louisiana. I was able to work around my school schedule. After I completed my trainings, the zoo offered me a full-time position with potential promotions.

Given the opportunity as a youth to work on the Work Experience Youth Program has offered the ability for me to gain job skills in places that would not have normally worked with me. I was not prepared for the workforce and lacked knowledge of what was expected of me once employed. I also lacked knowledge on how to go about finding a job once on my own. I had financial and health barriers as well.

I am now a full-time employee with Friends of the Alexandria Zoo. It was a dream of mine since I was a child to be an employee of the Alexandria Zoo. I am grateful for the assistance provided to me from the Inter-Tribal Council of Louisiana and my field service representative. I also thank my field service representative for the nominating me for 2019 Outstanding Participant Award.





**P.L. 102-477 Outstanding Participant**  
*Nominated by the Cherokee Nation*

**LIZA PINKSTON**  
*Cherokee Nation*

My name is Liza Pinkston; I was 22 years old when I walked through the doors of Cherokee Nation Career Services and found such wonderful people that have helped me find a new direction for my life. It had been a rough



couple of years for me and at that time I had chosen to focus on earning my GED. The goal to get my GED and to find employment was a means of keeping the promise I had eventually made to both my parents. It was a promise that they could let go and I would be okay, that I wouldn't be lost in the past. Every day I strive to keep my word and because of that I have overcome many things.

I had no prior knowledge of just how many ways in which a simple visit to Cherokee Nation could help someone. That October in 2017 was a crucial point in my life. It was the one year anniversary of my mother becoming sick and passing away. It also happened to be one month since losing my father to the many health concerns that he had dealt with longer than my entire life. I admit I was at a loss as to where to begin now that it was only myself that needed looking after.

I enrolled again in GED classes through the Cherokee Nation Alternative Education Department. It was through their encouragement that I received my GED in November 2017. The year 2018 became a very satisfying year for me. I successfully left the SNAP Benefits Program and will continue to be thankful for the assistance it provided me. I obtained my driver's license in March of 2018 with the Career Services staff cheering me on. It wasn't too long after that when I gained employment with Cherokee Nation Career Services as a full-time employee. It's been just over a year since I became a participant in Cherokee Nation Career Services' programs but the difference between my life then and now is beyond compare. Now I have moved on to my dream of a college education and am currently attending my 2nd semester in hopes of earning a degree in Sociology/Psychology. I have loved working alongside the ladies from Career Services and Alternative Education and am thankful for the belief they have shown in me. I am pleased beyond measure that with my job I now have the opportunity to not only refer people to all of the wonderful programs in our building, but to show them what can be accomplished through them. It is because of the help in succeeding thus far that I will be forever grateful for walking through those doors.





## P.L. 102-477 Outstanding Participant

*Nominated by the Citizen Potawatomi Nation*

### *Brandi Collins*

*Citizen Potawatomi Nation*

I am a Citizen Potawatomi Nation Tribal member and have been in and out of trouble my entire life starting when I was young as a pre-teen/teenager and continuing through adulthood. I was introduced to drugs and alcohol when I was a teenager and it seemed to take away the reality of my daily life for a time so I continued using so I could enjoy my life for a while.

I was a high school dropout and attended Job Core in Guthrie, OK long enough to get my GED and was immediately kicked out after that for failing a UA because I was smoking weed. I just got by at that point and finally decided to try to do something about it. I started coming to Workforce & Social Services in 2004. In 2009, I gave birth to my 3rd child and continued my downward spiral same as before using after pregnancy. It always got better when the Children's father was in jail but that was never long enough.



On January 21, 2012 I got my kids taken from me because of drug use. I was 33 at the time and I had been using since I was 16/17 years old. The day I got out of jail, my Tribe hooked me up with a 28 day inpatient treatment program in Texas so I left the next day to begin my journey. I still needed to be in treatment so when I was released from that treatment program I went straight to a 3 month program. When I got out of treatment, one of the caseworkers at CPN ICW picked me up and a bond was formed immediately. During the time I was in rehab other charges were filed so when I got out of treatment I went to the courthouse, turned myself in and went before the judge. I was placed on 2 years of probation. I was on my way up for the first time that I could remember.

In March 2013, I got my children back and was offered a job babysitting for a single father that was in need of childcare part time and in the summer it was full time. I was happy to be off of General Assistance and continued to come in and go to classes when offered at WSS. I started taking classes online to further my education and utilized the CPN free transit system when needed. Getting to know the kids and school kept me very busy.

In October 2017, with the assistance of WSS and Oklahoma Indian Legal Services, my record was expunged and I was amazed at that fact. The YMCA had been waiting a long time for this so I was hired immediately. I have worked at the same place for more than 5 years now and I could not be happier, I have been housekeeping supervisor since October 23, 2017. I also send a portion of my rent each month to an escrow account and I am hoping to be a homeowner in the future. This would not have been possible without the encouragement and support from my Tribe including WSS, ICW, LIHEAP, Community Services, Oklahoma Indian Legal Services and of course my Church Family. Now, I don't just ride the church bus, I drive it! I continue to grow and learn each day and am so happy to have my Family and extended Family.





## Alice Bigpond Roach Memorial Scholarship

*Nominated by California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc.*

### *Joseph Podlasek*

*Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Tribe*

Mr. Joseph Podlasek is a citizen of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Tribe and is of Polish descent. He studied technology at Richard J. Daley College in Chicago, IL and was Microsoft certified tech engineer before moving to nonprofit community leadership work. He is the father of three and lives in Itasca, IL.

Joe's involvement with CIMC began as a JTPA participant in 1999 and was placed as the Executive Director of the American Indian Center in Chicago, IL, where he successfully served for more than a decade. He then moved on to establish the Trickster Art Gallery, a nonprofit organization focused on cultural education, arts, and veteran programs in Schaumburg, IL, of which he is currently the CEO.

Joe has more than 25 years of experience in community development and social justice advocacy. He gained leadership skills through serving as delegate and former board member of CIMC, being a graduating fellow of the Leadership of Greater Chicago in 2003 and participating in the FBI Citizen Leadership Academy in 2010. Joe's past experience also includes serving on the Illinois Veterans Council and being a founding member and officer of the National Urban Indian Family Coalition.

Through Joe's efforts to make the Native American population visible through their military service, the annual National Gathering of Native American Veterans, now in its fifth year, was created. This past year, 47 tribes sent their veterans to receive information on traditional health and wellness, working with the VA, and employment and economic development for veterans after service. The upcoming Gathering is scheduled for July 2019 in Wheaton, IL.



Currently, the Trickster Gallery and Native veterans across the country are standing united in an effort to have our Eagle Staff recognized historically as the "First Flag" of these lands. Joe spearheaded the movement of the resolution (H. Res. 83) to congress. He recently had the opportunity to speak to many congressional representatives regarding Native issues when he attended, by invitation, the recent State of the Union Address in Washington, D.C. Joe is continually advocating for Native communities.





## Howard Yackus Memorial Scholarship

*Nominated by the Choctaw Nation*

### *Kimberly Tucker*

*Choctaw Nation*



My name is Kimberly Tucker a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I am currently enrolled at Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant, OK. My degree of study is Business Administration. I am a full time mother, student, and employee of the Choctaw Nation. I enrolled for services from the Choctaw Nation WIOA program in 2017. At that time, I needed assistance with employment. I briefly took a break from job search after finding out I was going to be a mother again. When my second son reached six months old I decided I was ready to begin job search.

I was applying for positions within the community but was not successful in finding employment. Employers were not willing to give me an opportunity to prove I am a good employee. I met with WIOA and continued my job search activities. WIOA was able to convince the Human Resource Department and retail store location I would be an asset to the Choctaw Nation. I began my work experience contract in July 2018. Since then, I have transferred to a busier location and received numerous accolades. WIOA has encouraged me every step of the way in my journey to complete my degree and to continue to grow as an employee of the Great Choctaw Nation.

While attending college, I will continue to work the Choctaw Travel Plaza because it provides the flexibility in scheduling needed to attend class. Upon completion of my Bachelor's degree, I plan on opening my own "Soul Food" restaurant in Durant, OK. My plan is to open the doors for Durant's first authentic soul food restaurant in 2025.





## Outstanding Employer

*Nominated by the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians*



**FOOD**  
For Lane County

In partnership with the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz, FFLC has placed three WEX participants in our two-year-old job training program. We have also worked with WEX placements to provide drivers training; currently two work as permanent staff members. These participants came with different barriers to overcome, but all of them embody FFLC's adopted agency values: "Compassion, Inclusion and Collaboration." The work they do makes a difference both inside FFLC, and in the community at large, alleviating hunger and creating equitable access to food. CTSI states "their partnership has been instrumental in assisting clients overcome barriers and gain required skills to enter the workforce."

