

2008 Outstanding Participant Award

Ramsey Funmaker
*Ho-Chunk Nation
Black River Falls, Wisconsin*



As a young child, Ramsey Funmaker's grandparents taught him the ways of their people — spiritual understandings and practices, cultural customs, and the HoCak language — and encouraged him to share those blessings with all of American society. Then in kindergarten, Ramsey was identified to have a learning disability, which started his attendance of Special Education classes until his sophomore year of high school. He spoke broken English and struggled to understand standard vernacular English and was ridiculed regularly as a “dumb Indian.” Ramsey believed that the continual mistreatment and discrimination was because he had a learning disability, and he simply gave up and dropped out of high school. The tremendous bouts of depression he experienced were further exacerbated by his increasing consumption of alcohol and drugs. Only after several years had passed was he able to overcome his substance abuse

addictions and realize he wanted more out of life.

He tried looking for work but there wasn't anything available for him due to his lack of education and work experience. In 1998, when he first enrolled in the 477 federal program through the Ho-Chunk Nation Labor Department, Ramsey was unemployed and using alcohol. His initial goal was to get through the program without alcohol. He was also experiencing a severe financial situation, so he received help to cover his gas and lunch assistance during high school besides securing a part-time job.

The program provided him with the necessary tools to overcome his disability through appropriate learning activities, learn more about workforce development through workshops, make the big decision of going back to school to continue his education, and gain employability skills to enrich his future professional life. In four years, Ramsey received his high school

equivalency diploma through classroom training at Western Technical College.

The words of his grandparents stuck with him, “We must work hard to make other people understand and respect us in the HoCak way and to our HoCak people to find a better way of life so we could understand and respect each other in the HoCak way.”

Ramsey has met the challenges of many barriers partially due to his learning disability and his family's living conditions. His heart of gold, kind demeanor, and personal strength makes him a model tribal member. Though he wasn't able to take the GED tests due to his learning disabilities, a process was created to allow him to learn and receive credit in place of testing. Ramsey's perseverance and foresight paid off when he received his GED in October 2007. Equally important, he's managed to remain sober throughout his process.

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Sonya Begay

***Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Inc.
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania***

Prior to Sonya Begay's involvement with the Council of Three Rivers WIA Employment and Training Program, she resided in Los Angeles, California, and was employed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals as a Legal Researcher. Desperate to escape a devastatingly abusive relationship, she relocated with her three sons to Arizona and attended the Navajo Community College where she studied Psychology (1995-1996) and was nominated for Who's Who of American Junior Colleges.

Sonya had endured a domestic violence relationship for twelve years. She raised her three sons on her own with very little support, and experienced periods of homelessness, financial hardship, and a life threatening strep infection while doctors sought an effective antibody. To date, she still suffers some side effects, which includes periodic memory loss.

While pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and Psychology at Eastern Kentucky University, she received two years of classroom training assistance (Fall 1996 – Spring

1998), which included tuition and supportive services. She obtained her degree in 1998. Upon completion of her Bachelor's Degree, Sonya was recommended for an Internship with the U.S. Department of Energy within the Department of Environmental Management. In the role of researcher, she worked within a cooperative agreement between the Department of Energy and tribes in the states of Washington and New Mexico. In September, 2001, she was recommended for a WIA E&T Counselor position with the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center in Lexington, Kentucky, and served in that capacity for five years while pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Administration at Eastern Kentucky University. She was promoted to WIA Program Director for the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center in April 2007. She now administers the U. S. Department of Labor grant in four states.

Sonya has demonstrated her remarkable capacity to persevere and thrive regardless of the many obstacles she has encountered through-

out her life. In the face of adversity she has continued to educate herself, support her family, and provide leadership and service to others. She accepted custody of her three grandchildren as she advocated for the rights of American Indian children and educated social service workers and legislators about the issues relating to a relevant, useful implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act in the state of Kentucky. Sonya has been an asset to her family, the community, the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center's WIA E&T Program, and her Native family.

Kentucky State Representative Reginald K. Meeks has commended Sonya as a "tireless advocate on behalf of poor and underrepresented populations in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. She has also taken a very devastating family experience and directed her energies into making positive actions bloom from her experiences. In so doing, Sonya demonstrated the utmost character and resolve on behalf of Native American children, and the Commonwealth owes her a debt of gratitude."

2008 Outstanding Participant Award

Elena Cordova

***Pascua Yaqui Tribe
Tucson, Arizona***



Elena Cordova was raised and experienced poverty and a desolate life on the Pascua Yaqui Reservation southwest of the city of Tucson, Arizona, and inherently came to realize that she would have to put her best foot forward to be able to succeed in this world.

Elena has expressed to the Pascua Yaqui Tribal WIA Program staff that upon entering the program, she experienced what she considered a “defining moment” in her life. She clearly understood that although she had the support of her family and friends, she lacked the proper academic and financial support needed to accomplish her endeavors and implicitly turned to the WIA program to help sustain the journey on which she was about to embark.

Determined to accomplish her goals and turn life obstacles into challenges, Elena became a “first generation graduate” — the first in her family to gradu-

ate from college and the first female tribal member to receive her degree in electrical engineering. Her amazing resilience and single-mindedness to excel academically as well as in life carried her throughout her journey.

Elena first enrolled at Pima Community College where she completed her Associates of Applied Science degree in Electronic Technology. She then applied and was accepted into the College of Engineering at the University of Arizona, where less than ten percent of the students were female and less than two percent were Native American. She completed her Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering this past Fall 2007. Throughout her course of study Elena received numerous awards from a number of foundations: American Indian Science and Engineering Foundation, National Science Foundation Future-Bound Program, and an Achievement Award from the Lyndon

B. Johnson Space Center at NASA. She was also presented with an award in recognition of her contribution toward making the launch of the space shuttle Atlantis that occurred on June 8, 2007 successful. She is now engaged in gainful employment at Raytheon Missile Systems in Tucson, Arizona.

Elena, “one of our own,” is a vibrant, exuberant young Pascua Yaqui Tribal member who has endured, succeeded, and accomplished what at one point in her life was merely a “dream, an aspiration, a thought.” She continues to be involved in the WIA program by mentoring, tutoring, and giving of herself to ensure that other Tribal members like her can “walk the same path” and understand that she isn’t an anomaly and that “spirit, resiliency, and determination” still exist in the Native “way of life”.

Elena Cordova is living proof of what it means to be outstanding.

2008 Howard Yackus Memorial Scholarship Award



Jason Hawk

***Citizen Potawatomi Nation
Shawnee, Oklahoma***

Jason Hawk, a member of the Cherokee Nation, and his older brother worked during high school to support their mother and grandmother. The boys only had two hours of sleep before going to school and, eventually, the long work hours and additional trouble from fighting in school defending his brother resulted in Jason dropping out during his freshman year. He went along with the demanding job of forklift operator where his father worked, and had neither guidance nor direction regarding his future.

Over time, Jason married and moved to the Shawnee area where his wife's family lived. His one-way commute to work was over an hour and the new couple's joint income didn't cover their truck payment and other bills. Jason took a chance. He quit his job and came to the Citizen Potawatomi Nation 477 (WIA) Program for help, where he received tremendous support. The staff provided supportive mentoring and encouraged him to complete his General Education Degree, apply for a job, and continue his higher education

goals. Jason is now in his second year of college at Seminole State University and has maintained for the past three semesters an outstanding 4.0 GPA.

Jason's immediate goal now is to obtain an Associate's Degree in Accounting. He then plans to seek a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Oklahoma then continue on to pursue a Master's Degree, become a Certified Public Accountant, and establish and own his own accounting firm. Jason believes that all of these goals wouldn't have been possible without the support and assistance he has received from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation 477 (WIA) Program, noting that they assisted him with his text books, tuition, and gasoline to get to and from school, and occasional supportive service, but most importantly his educational guidance.

While Jason's study-work schedule is extremely demanding (as a full-time enrolled student and full-time heavy equipment operator for CPN), he doesn't want to back down because he has learned that he can do it. He

emphatically said, "I know I can and I will not give up," and credited his wife for standing by his side through his challenges and reminding him to keep his eye on his goal and keep fighting to accomplish it.

Most recently, Jason Hawk was honored by the President of Seminole State College for his exemplary academic achievements, and invited to become an honorable member of the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society of the Two-Year College.

Jason has also convinced his brother that achieving your education and making something of yourself was possible, and he is proud to share that his brother is now attending college.

Jason Hawk gives thanks to his wife and the CPN 477 (WIA) Program for giving him the educational guidance he needed to realize and attain his goals — "With support, encouragement, and financial assistance, I am going to make something of my life. I have worked to transform my life; in doing so I have come to develop a good work ethic and stronger self-esteem."

2008 Alice BigPond Roach Memorial Award

William Quackenbush
Ho-Chunk Nation
Black River Falls, Wisconsin



Throughout his childhood and early adult life, William Quackenbush experienced great social barriers and physical struggles, which, over time, he overcame through the continual guidance, perseverance, and instruction from his parents, elders, and community. No surprise then that Bill's initial outlook on life was to finish high school, do manual labor, and get married. However, after receiving his high school diploma, Bill realized he wanted to further his education. Unfortunately, his lack of resources and other financial barriers prevented him from pursuing his dream.

Bill has been employed by the Ho-Chunk Nation for the past nine years, and is currently the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, a

position that requires expertise in consulting for the Nation in processing Federal Projects. He regularly conducts public lectures on behalf of the Nation to protect, manage, and reduce or mitigate harm to Cultural Resources and properties.

Over three years ago, Bill, a Ho-Chunk Nation Tribal member, signed up with the Ho-Chunk Nation 477 Federal Program. It was then that his Supervisor inspired him to represent the Department of Natural Resources. Not fully understanding what was in store, he followed-up on this opportunity to further his education. Today, Bill is currently enrolled in the Supervisory Management Program at Western Technical College where he maintains an impressive 4.0 GPA. He will soon graduate with an Associates

Degree in Supervisory Management and plans to apply his newly learned knowledge to his daily duties.

During his professional career with the Ho-Chunk Nation, Bill has had the opportunity to participate in various learning experiences, educational training events, and work experiences, all of which have been instrumental in his development of leadership qualities.

William Quackenbush also credits much of his success to his loving, supportive family of twenty-three years — his lovely wife and four children ages six to nineteen.

Bill regards working for his people as one of the greatest honors and privileges.