

Disney sponsors Youth Entrepreneurial Development of Native Americans

by C. Ray Carlson

At the American Indian Chamber of Commerce (AICC) EXPO '05 on August 2,



in the Wyndham Hotel (Agua Caliente tribe) in Palm Springs, a new dimension was added: Youth Entrepreneurial Development. About 35 Indian youth were invited to participate

in a 2-hour seminar with Indian business leaders talking about what it takes to become entrepreneurs. When I saw the sign posted outside the session I was thrilled to see not only the subject matter but the prestigious name of Disney as sponsor.

Jennifer Villalobos, our coordinator of the Rotary District 5300 outreach to Indian youth, and I have been promoting youth entrepreneurship to the leaders of the AICC for several years. Both of us are members. A major impression was made when several of our *alumni* attended an AICC meeting at Twin Palms Restaurant in Pasadena (part-owned by San Manuel Mission Band of Indians) and presented the nugget of their business plans. One Indian businessman peeled off \$100 bills for each of the students!

The students toured the Trade Fair and learned about a variety of business opportunities.

Villalobos had a display table, and I manned it while she attended meetings and generally sought to meet with as many Indian leaders as possible. I met a professor of marketing at San Diego State University who offered to help line up MBA interns for teaching Indian youth about entrepreneurship and how to write business plans.

One of the panel discussions involved four tribal chiefs in a fascinating discussion of why it is so difficult for Indian-owned businesses to become suppliers to the Indian-owned casinos. The bottom-line is that the casinos will not pay even slightly



higher prices to help them. An extra 2 cents per bar of soap for casino hotels can add up to a lot of money, was given as an illustration. No *affirmative action* by casinos, it seemed. The *Wal-Mart syndrome* prevails: the cheapest supplier gets the contract, and production inexorably moves to China.

But the major non-Indian-owned suppliers (SBC, Boeing, Honda, etc) were at the EXPO in force and actively solicited participation of Indian

businesses. I suspected that they had US federal government quotas of *diversity* in suppliers to meet. Quotas that do not affect the sovereign Indian nations.

I was thrilled that Villalobos recently completed two entrepreneurship classes that were entirely financed from tribal sources. The *seed money* from the partnership of Rotary Clubs of Altadena, Arcadia, Montebello, Pasadena Sunrise, together with grants from the District 5300 Foundation Inc., and The Rotary Foundation, will continue to be used to program classes where there is no such funding available. Our hope is that the Casino Foundations and their tribal elders will see the value of financing a comprehensive program that reaches all of the 400,000

Indian teenagers in America, so that they will have a much better economic future that gives them Hope, and away from the depression that currently leads many to alcohol, drugs, violence, and promiscuity. We will need a lot

more money to make this happen and to enable Villalobos to devote full-time to this unique Rotary-inspired venture.

For more information and how your



club can help, contact craycarlson@altadenarotary.com. ○