

The Division of Capital Investment (DCI), from the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development (IEED), Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs (ASIA), recently held a conference at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians reservation. Representatives from DCI also were treated to a tour of the reservation by Muskogee Technology's Director of Marketing, Mal McGhee, and a presentation given by Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority President/CEO James T. Martin.

Martin explained how PBCI has used economic development to further diversity from the gaming industry and how the Tribe utilizes its businesses. The group visited the Cultural Museum as well as tribal housing and government, ball fields and recreation areas on the reservation, Judson Cemetery and other businesses managed by Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is the oldest bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Established in 1824, BIA provides services — directly or through contracts, grants or compacts — to almost 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians has received benefits from the BIA in many areas: when the Tribe purchased the Best Western hotel in 1988 and renamed it Muskogee Inn, BIA stepped in to help with funds and support. Roads, bridges and infrastructure on the reservation also were built and maintained through the BIA.

The difference with our Tribe is that we are a self-governing Tribe and do not let the U.S. government dictate where their support goes. The BIA provides grants for certain areas, such as health, education, economic development, etc., but the Poarch Band of Creek Indians uses those resources how it sees fit. Other tribes rely on the BIA for guidance, whereas PBCI does not.

The following is a question and answer session with a few of DCI's representatives:

Q: What is your main focus as an organization on behalf of Indian tribes?

A: David Johnson — We make sure tribes have the same economic development opportunities as everyone else. In our DCI office, we manage the Indian Loan Guaranty, Insurance and Interest Subsidy Program, which breaks through the conventional barriers to financing for tribes and individual Indians. The loan program helps facilitate loan financing for borrowers that would not be able to do so otherwise. The division helps secure reasonable interest rates and reduces risks for all parties involved. We bring lenders and borrowers together so that all may prosper.

Q: What are the most utilized programs under IA and how do they help tribes?

A: David Johnson — I would say our loan guarantee program is one of our best resources we offer. We also have various offices that help tribes with everything from computer problems to business development and planning, budgets, accounting and so forth.

Q: What is the IEED's role in the government-to-government relationship with the United States?

A: James West — The Division of Capital Investment is working hard to provide opportunities for economic development through the Insurance and Loan Guarantee program.

Michael Luger — Our responsibility is making sure tribes have access to capital. We protect their rights and improve their quality of life. We provide funding, support and training, land management opportunities for their trust land and even build roads, bridges and infrastructure to better help maintain tribal communities.

Q: What are the challenges you face as a government entity?

A: Cheryl King — I think the biggest frustration is getting people educated and informed about what is available to them. Many tribal communities don't realize that we are here to help and that no question or idea is too small for us to administer help in getting to the end result.

Martin reiterated the importance of this group's support: "While in my role as Former USET (United South and Eastern Tribes) Director, I saw firsthand how IEED has stimulated economic development in Indian country through its guaranteed loan program," he said. "They play a vital role in spring boarding Native American entrepreneurship across the country."



Creek Indian Enterprises
Development Authority

Back row: Mal McGhee, Jerry Ryburn, Michael Luger, Stephanie West, Michael Berryhill, James West and Cheryl King.
Front row: James T. Martin, Martin Nouri, David Johnson and Dawayne Robinson.



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