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Building economic prosperity through Native American tourism

By Rosemary Stephens, Editor-in-Chief

On Sept. 22-26, 2013 the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) hosted over 150 attendees at their 15th annual American Indian Tourism conference at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Catoosa, Okla.

AIANTA is a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit association of American Indian tribes and tribal tourism created in 2002 to advance Indian Country tourism.

"AIANTA is about introducing Indian Country to the world through tourism, promoting your tribes and to bring tourism to your tribal

growth and sustenance of Indian Country tourism.

"Planning is the key to take your tourism into the international markets. People in other countries are fascinated by Native American culture and want to learn more about us. We can provide them with accurate history, culture and traditions by promoting our tribes and all they have to offer," Ferguson said.

Ferguson accepted the position as AIANTA executive director in January 2013. She is Tlingit from the Kiksadi Clan and a member of the Sitka tribe of Alaska.



Photos by Rosemary Stephens

American Indian, Alaska Natives Tourism Association (AIANTA) Executive Director, Camille Ferguson welcomes tribal nations, tourism representatives and guests to the 15th annual AIANTA Tourism conference in Tulsa, Okla.

"AIANTA is about introducing Indian Country to the world through tourism, promoting your tribes and to bring tourism to your tribal destinations," Camille Ferguson, AIANTA executive director said. "I am proud to be a part of this national nonprofit organization that



Courtesy photo

James Surveyor, a member of the Hopi Tribe of Arizona and the Marketing and Special Events Manager of the Moenkopi Legacy Inn and Suites.

is making a profound difference in economic development through cultural heritage tourism for American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians across the U.S."

AIANTA's states its purpose is to provide constituents with the voice and tools needed to advance tourism while helping tribes, tribal organizations and tribal members create infrastructure and capacity through technical assistance, training and educational resources. AIANTA serves as the liaison among Indian Country government-

tal, educational and private entities for the development,

position as AIANTA executive director in January 2013. She is Tlingit from the Kiksadi Clan and a member of the Sitka tribe of Alaska. She served as her tribes' economic development director for 15 years, where she established, expanded and managed the tribes' Tourism Department, Transportation Department, Gaming Department, Tribal Tannery and Community House Convention Facility. She also served as the president of the Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau where she raised hotel bed tax revenue by 48 percent.

AIANTA partners with the National Park Services (NPS), Smithsonian's National Museum and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to help preserve and have recognized American Indian history as an integral part of American History. As part of that commitment, Ferguson said the NPS has made a commitment to include American Indian voices in the 150th anniversary commemoration of America's Civil by producing a book entitled, American Indians and the Civil War. The book documents stories expressing how this period of American history impacted American Indians and the roles they played in the civil war.

"This initiative is unprecedented and has led to many other exciting partnership opportunities that will be revealed in the near future," Ferguson said.

Also during their annual conference new board mem-

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Native American fashion designers preview some of their designs during the AIANTA tourism conference. Native American fashions are quickly becoming hot items in the fashion industry.

bers were elected for the upcoming year.

James Surveyor, a member of the Hopi tribe of Arizona and the Marketing and Special Events Manager of the Moenkopi Legacy Inn and Suites participated in this year's conference and was elected to serve as a member of the AIANTA Board of Directors.

"I want to express my appreciation to be able to serve on the board of such a prestigious organization. I hope that my contributions will support the mission of AIANTA to introduce Native cultures to the world and, in so doing, create a better economic future for all of our Native communities," Surveyor said.

Surveyor is also Cheyenne, whose uncle Harvey Surveyor is a member of the

Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes and works in the IT Depart-



ment in Concho, Okla.

Among the many workshops, breakout sessions and receptions, the AIANTA hosted their first Indigenous Fashion show with fashion designers Margaret Roach Wheeler, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Tonia Hogner-Weavel, Cherokee, and Lisa Rutherford, Cherokee.

For more information

about AIANTA visit www.aianta.org or call (505) 724-