



FRONTIER CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Profile Series

Profile of:

REANNA AGUINO

***"work hard, don't give up,
and always keep looking for opportunities."***

Reanna Aguino, 38, is the quintessential Indigenous business leader, having started as a secretary/treasurer for Tsay Professional Services Inc. and is now the president of the company.

Aguino is a tribal member of Ohkay Owingeh, a Pueblo Indigenous community in New Mexico. There are 3,000 enrolled tribal members, with 2,000 still living in New Mexico. About 1,000 tribal members reside elsewhere.



Ohkay Owingeh is located just north of Sante Fe, New Mexico, the state's capital city. There are 19 Pueblo communities across New Mexico.

Ohkay Owingeh has diversified well beyond its traditional casino and hotel developments. Tsay Corporation is now the development company for the tribal community. Recently, the company decided to move into federal contracting as a way to survive after gaming did not take the community to where it needed to be.

Tsay Corporation owns several companies, of which Tsay Professional Services – where Aguino works – is but one. Established in 1994, Tsay Federal Contracting Group is based in New Mexico and works with federal government customers in the areas of construction, public works, facilities support, and janitorial supports. In 2004, Tsay was restricted into a holding company which is comprised of three wholly-owned subsidiaries. In 2009, Tsay Professional Services Inc. was founded.

About 500 of its about 1,200 employees are in northern New Mexico and the rest are located elsewhere in the United States.

The federal contracting business has now grown to a point where it provides about 75 percent of the tribe's annual revenue.

Aguino said she grew up in the small Ohkay Owingeh, which she described as, "very close-knit." She said Indigenous Pueblo cultural activities were well-known and practiced in the community. "We all grew up with the culture, so we don't know any different."

She grew up in a family of all sisters and she described her mother as a chief formative influence. She said she grew up with strong female role models, who were all "go-getters."

"She always emphasized hard work, sacrifice, and appreciation for what you had," she said.

After completing high school, she was awarded numerous scholarships for college; among them, The Ohkay Owingeh scholarship and Po'Pay scholarship from her Pueblo community. She attended the Council of Energy Resource TRIBES college preparatory program at the University of New Mex-

ico (located in Albuquerque, New Mexico), graduated with her bachelor's and master's degree from The University of New Mexico Robert O. Anderson School of Management.

Her educational background is in accounting, but Aguino described her experience working as a co-ordinator for an annual outdoor Pueblo arts and crafts show as a turning point in her career and life. Pueblo Natives and other groups from across the United States showcased and sold their wares at the event.



From there, Aguino was hired as a contracts specialist with the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council, Inc., the non-profit consortium of eight Pueblo tribal governments in northern New Mexico that ran the arts and crafts show. The organization provided a variety of services to Pueblo communities, including food distribution, employment

and training, child care, and peacekeepers (working in conflict resolution).

Afterward, Aguino's career took her to Tsay Corporation, her community's tribally-owned business. However, she started there as a board member from 2004 to 2006.

In order to start paid work there she had to eventually resign from that board. At first, she was hired as junior controller and was in charge of overseeing the company's retail locations. From there, she moved up within the company and was promoted to the position of full controller where she was charged with overseeing more business entities.

In 2013, she moved on to the presidency of the professional services division of the company, which is the position she holds now.

Since then, she said, the Tsay Corporation has enjoyed work from some major federal contracts. For instance, one contract is with the U.S. Department of Energy, where they work with Regulatory Support Services in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Also, the company has a contract for grounds maintenance with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) out of Kirtland Air Forces Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Additionally, Tsay Corporation has acquired a contract with the Department of the Army out of Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico, also providing grounds maintenance services, as well as base maintenance services at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri.

Aguino said the most significant challenge for the company was in building up a good reputation within the federal contracting world. That reputation, of course, was all based on past perfor-

mance of contract work. By building a reputation for quality work, the Tsay Corporation was slowly able to build its growing list of federal clientele.

However, like other businesses located on Native American reservations lands, Aguino said the main challenge as an entrepreneur and business leader was securing capital. As land is owned collectively, it cannot be used as collateral to secure business loans. The tribal company, she said, was able to secure business financing by purchasing non-tribal trust land off the reservation and used cash from the other businesses associated with the corporation.

"We've been pretty lucky since we have been able to use some of the spin-off companies to help with financing," she said.

She also attributed much of the company's success to its positive relations with the local tribal council. She said, "they have always been supportive."

As far as advice for aspiring Native American entrepreneurs and business leaders, Aguino said they should, "work hard, don't give up, and always keep

looking for opportunities."

A key strength her Pueblo Indigenous community has drawn on, she said, was in always sharing resources and a strong sense of community. She said that other Native American communities could learn from that and should be always helping other Native American entrepreneurs succeed.

Aguino has certainly earned recognition and acclaim for her outstanding work within her business and her steady climb within the organization.

The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED) – a non-profit organization that assists American Indian tribes and their enterprises with business and economic development – named her among its 2017 class of "Native American 40 Under 40" award recipients. The prestigious award is bestowed upon individuals under the age of 40, nominated by members of their communities, who have demonstrated leadership, initiative, and dedication and made significant contributions in business and their community.



203-2727 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3J 0R2

Tel: 204-957-1567

Email: manitoba@fcpp.org

The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is an independent, non-profit organization that undertakes research and education in support of economic growth and social outcomes that will enhance the quality of life in our communities. Through a variety of publications and public forums, Frontier explores policy innovations required to make the prairie region a winner in the open economy. It also provides new insights into solving important issues facing our cities, towns and provinces. These include improving the performance of public expenditures in important areas such as local government, education, health and social policy. The authors of this study have worked independently and the opinions expressed are therefore their own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the board of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

Copyright © 2018 by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

Profile Series No. 8 • Date of First Issue: March 2018.

Reproduced here with permission of the authors. Any errors or omissions and the accuracy and completeness of this paper remain the responsibility of the authors.

ISSN 1491-78

Ideas that change your world / www.fcpp.org



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from north-eastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations.

For over two years, he covered House standing committees as well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.