

Summit aims to support, catalyze Native businesswomen

Written by By Damon Scott, Finance New Mexico
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New Mexico is home to a large Native American population, but business opportunities for Native women can be elusive. The Native Women's Business Summit — scheduled for April 13-14 at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, 2401 12th Street NW in Albuquerque — aims to change that.

Summit co-founders Vanessa Roanhorse and Stephine Poston want to increase the number of businesses owned by Native women. They believe that by harnessing the strength and support of Native women already in business, others can be encouraged to create their futures through businesses ownership.

The summit is a forum where Native women can network and learn from each other, said Roanhorse. "A lot of other folks will attend too, but it's about providing a space for Native

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women to come together.”

When Roanhorse, who is Navajo, returned to the Four Corners area after a decade in Chicago, she started researching what resources were available for women interested in starting a business. She was pleased to see dedicated organizations providing support, she said, but there were few women of color in mentorship and teaching roles.

“Parallel to this,” Roanhorse said, “I was randomly running into phenomenal Native women in business solving all kinds of challenges and creating products and services our communities are in desperate need of.”

The summit brings everything together: tools for developing hard businesses skills and successful Native businesswomen to mentor and help other Native women entrepreneurs envision themselves in leadership roles. “There is something very empowering about being able to see yourself in other people,” Roanhorse said.

Roanhorse and Poston gathered ideas for the summit at a 2017 kick-off event called Elevate. More than 70 Native American, Alaskan Native and First Nations women attended, representing over 25 North American tribal nations. Nonprofit Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) Accion and New Mexico Community Capital donated the venue and materials that encouraged participants to speak up about their needs. Participants confirmed they want to know more Native women in business to help them pursue contracts, partnerships and job opportunities.

The 2018 summit aims to fill those requests. Sessions will be led by tribal and business leaders and will cover topics ranging from finance to employment practices. Investment professionals will discuss budgeting, cash flow and how to access capital. Participants can also expect one-on-one mentorship with experienced Native American business owners.

“Native people are making space for themselves at the table,” said Roanhorse. “This has been a growing movement of successful Natives in business who have been trailblazing the pathway forward.”

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Roanhorse cited her summit partner as an example of a Native woman trailblazer. Poston is CEO of Poston & Associates, headquartered on the Pueblo of Sandia. The company, founded in 2002, provides public relations and event planning for the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department, the National Indian Gaming Association, the American Indian Graduate Center and other tribal organizations.

“There is so much room for us to dream big and do good things to build a culture of good in New Mexico and make this the preeminent place in which Native American businesses thrive,” said Roanhorse.

Register for the Native Women’s Business Summit at: <http://nativewomenlead.org/> .

Program updates can be found at

<https://www.facebook.com/nativewomensbusinesssummit/>

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