



## **PRESS RELEASE** **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Eagle River Entrepreneurs Win Big in Business Ideas Competition**

*Jill Wheeler and Tonia Lawrence awarded \$20,000 in Seed Money for  
Educational Tour Company in Eagle River*

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ANCHORAGE: Jill Wheeler and Tonia Lawrence of Eagle River won \$20,000 and one year of free mentoring and business coaching in the first-ever Alaska Marketplace competition. Finals were held in Anchorage on April 6, 2006, the culmination of many months of hard work by the more than 163 Alaska entrepreneurs who participated.

At the April event, 43 Alaska innovators presented their business ideas to a panel of statewide and national business experts. Sponsor BP made a surprise contribution that more than doubled the original award pool from \$200,000 to \$500,000.

"The company showcases Alaska's unique ecology, cultural heritage and history by immersing educators in rural communities; i.e., 'Alaska - off the beaten path,'" said Wheeler.

Alaska Educational Tours will allow educators and special interest groups to travel to rural communities in Southcentral Alaska where they will participate in daily activities with residents and attend workshops facilitated by Alaskan experts and artisans. Additionally, educators will have the opportunity to register for a professional development course through the University of Alaska Anchorage where credit will be earned for creating a teaching unit based on their experiences.

The *Alaska Marketplace* is open to Native and non-Native Alaskans with innovative ideas for businesses that benefit rural Alaska and its people. The 22 competition winners were from communities throughout the state. Three People's Choice awards of \$1,000 were also awarded for the general public's favorite proposals.

The *Alaska Marketplace* is patterned after the Development Marketplace (DM), a World Bank project, which held its first Innovation Marketplace in May 1998 for bank employees at the direction of James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, to develop new strategies to more effectively fight poverty. The DM has expanded to a global competition for innovative development ideas which the World Bank organizes and hosts every 18-24 months. Since 1998, the DM has invested more than \$22 million in more than 370 innovative projects in 61 countries.

The *Alaska Marketplace* is a special project of the **Alaska Federation of Natives**. The first year featured strong partnerships with the Alaska Manufacturing Extension Partnership, BP, ConocoPhillips, Denali Commission, and the Telecommunications Development Fund. Other partners include the College of Rural Alaska, University of Alaska, Fairbanks and Alaska Village Initiatives.

For more information on the *Alaska Marketplace*, please visit [www.alaskamarketplace.org](http://www.alaskamarketplace.org) or contact the Alaska Federation of Natives office at (907) 274-3611.

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