

Hope STEMS, Native American Students Blossom

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Denver, Colo., Oct. 15, 2014 – A hardscrabble childhood didn't "harden" Erika Torres-Hernandez, but it did sharpen the Chippewa-Cree tribe member's resolve to achieve her goals and give back.

A recipient of a Toyota Tribal College Scholarship, Torres-Hernandez studies math at a tribal college in Rocky Boy, Mont. Once the 3.7-GPA student earns her four-year degree from a university, she plans to return to the reservation to teach high school.

“All of my life I’ve loved math and helping people learn new concepts,” she says.

To help Torres-Hernandez and other Native American students earn an education in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. is donating \$1 million to the American Indian College Fund (the College Fund). The national Native American education non-profit is commemorating its 25th anniversary.

Since 1999, Toyota has helped more than 1,300 Native American students earn a college degree through its Toyota Tribal College Scholarship Program with the College Fund. Four-hundred thousand dollars of this landmark gift will continue Toyota’s scholarship program through 2018.

In addition to the \$400,000 in scholarships, Toyota’s donation includes \$250,000 in unrestricted funds to the College Fund; \$150,000 in-kind gifts; and \$200,000 to fund environmental sustainability programs at the TCUs.

The resurgence of interest amongst Native American students in the environmental sustainability and science fields dovetails with Toyota’s philanthropic goals that focus on education, safety and the environment.

“We consider it a great privilege to celebrate the American Indian College Fund’s 25th anniversary with this gift. Their ongoing work is critical not only in the Native American community, but for all of us who value diversity of thought and culture in our communities.” says Michael Rouse, Toyota vice president of diversity, philanthropy and community affairs.

Cheryl Crazy Bull, President and CEO of the American Indian College Fund says, “We are pleased to expand our partnership with Toyota in support of the education of our students. Tribal colleges address the dismal reality that only about 1% of Native American people get to go to college. Because of the support of Toyota, we are able to provide access to college to dozens of students. This is an amazing and welcome commemoration of the College Fund’s 25th anniversary and directs us down the path of even more educational success for the next 25 years.”