

# An Emerging Leader

by Adan Ortega

In March of 2011, while judging the National American Indian Science and Engineering Fair, I was asked to write about being the proud parent of an AIGC Scholarship recipient. Alicia's mother, Rebecca Ortega, and I are honored, proud and happy that our daughter, Alicia, is an American Indian Graduate Center Fellow. She received her fellowship in Fall 2010, as she was admitted into graduate school. We cannot describe the gratitude that we feel for programs such as the American Indian Graduate Center that help alleviate the financial burden that comes along with sending your children to college. Throughout Alicia's life, she has always enjoyed learning and teaching others. She has demonstrated many leadership qualities, since she was very young, that made it crystal clear she was destined for great things in her life, with college, of course, being one of them.

In May of 2010, our daughter received her Bachelor of Business Administration degree, with a concentration in Organizational Management and Entrepreneurial Studies, from the University of New Mexico, Anderson School of Management. Immediately, she began working on her Masters of Business Administration degree the following semester in Fall 2010. She is a candidate for two concentrations in Marketing and Management of Technology and is planning on graduating in May of 2012. We feel so very blessed to have Alicia as our daughter.

Alicia has taught us many things since the day she was born. Her arrival was a very scary time for us because, at one point, we thought we were going to lose her. She showed us that God is in control and that He puts special people in place to help us and show us that the power of prayer truly exists. Alicia is from the Pueblos of Pojoaque and Santa Clara. She is an enrolled tribal member of Pojoaque Pueblo and grew up on the Santa Clara Pueblo Reservation. As a child, she



Alicia with her parents and brothers

attended the Santa Clara Day School. During that time, she was extremely interested in science projects and art.

Alicia's science fair interest and journey began in the fifth grade, when she won the Santa Clara Day School science fair and advanced to the Northern Pueblo Agency science fair. She later went on to compete in the

American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) Science Fair, where her projects placed every time. Then, after being encouraged by her mentor, Dr. Bobbie Coleman, she began to compete in the "mainstream" science fairs, such as the New Mexico Northern Regional Science Fair and New Mexico State Science Fairs. She placed 1st place at both! As Alicia started competing at the high school level, she was selected as a "Grand Award Winner", during the AISES Science Fair, and went on to compete in the world-renowned Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF). The first year she won, she competed in

the Intel ISEF in Louisville, Kentucky. The second year, she competed at the Intel ISEF in Cleveland, Ohio. We were very honored and excited to tag along with Alicia and attend the Intel ISEF twice. There were so many students from all over the world, representing over 39 countries, with incredible science projects and so much security. It was an awesome experience and the second year we went, Alicia won a special award!



Alicia

Along with science, Alicia also developed a passion for art. At the young age of 8, she was inspired by her brother, Adam Deer Mountain Ortega, to become an artist. She quickly became a self-taught artist using ink and color pencils to create drawings. For several years, she participated in the Eight Northern Arts and Crafts Fair and as a youth artist at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Her work received many awards and she was recently selected to participate in the 2011 Santa Fe Indian Market as an adult artist. While in high school, along with being an artist, Alicia was very involved with extracurricular school activities. She played soccer, was a member of the dance team and cheered on the cheerleading team all through high school. She also belonged to various clubs, such as MESA and Key Clubs.

After graduating high school in 2005, Alicia immediately began attending the University of New Mexico. It was a very bittersweet time for us, filled with a lot of emotions and feelings of happiness, sadness, joy and excitement. We really missed her at home, especially her younger brother, Mario. At the same time, we were happy that she chose to pursue higher education. Nonetheless, in the midst of all the college excitement, Alicia remained committed to her cultural values and still always made a big effort to come home to participate in the cultural activities and dances. We feel this is extremely important. We have tried to instill a sense of balance for our children about what is important and we feel education and culture are both equally important.

With that said, in 2006, Alicia accepted a summer AISES Internship at the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio, working with the Biomedical Engineering Division. In 2007, she accepted another summer Internship at the Argonne National Laboratory in Argonne, Illinois, in the Environmental Science Division. Through these internships, Alicia has gained a lot of valuable experience and knowledge. Throughout the school year, she has worked very closely and held various positions with numerous student organizations at UNM. Some of the organizations in which Alicia has been involved include the UNM AISES Chapter, Delta Sigma Pi Professional Business Fraternity, American Indian Business Leaders and the American Indian Business Association, where she serves as President. Alicia also does a lot of volunteer work with several organizations including; Project Share, The Storehouse, The Watermelon Ranch and several others. Recently, Alicia represented the Anderson School of Management and the American Indian Business Association, as she attended and presented at the 2010 International Fostering Indigenous Business and Entrepreneurship in the Ameri-



*Dancing*

cas (FIBEA) Conference, in Manaus, Brazil. She also attends and volunteers at numerous American Indian business conferences throughout the state and country.

This summer, Alicia is currently working as a student intern at Keres Consulting Inc., which is a Native American-owned general consulting firm. Alicia has always expressed her love for her culture, her people and the traditions. It is important to her to represent, support, promote and encourage Native people, particularly Native youth. She has always said she is committed to helping the Native community and as many others as possible in any way that she can. She has shown her passion and commitment through her art, the organizations in which she participates, volunteer work and the way she lives her life. She continues to be a role model to her friends, her tribe, our family and the community. She is a true survivor and a Native leader and we are very thankful for the opportunities she has been given. Alicia has been an inspiration in our lives. Alicia and our two sons are our beautiful blessings from God. Thank you, AIGC, for supporting and encouraging Alicia and all Native people to pursue their education, embrace their culture and fulfill their dreams! ♦