

Shawano woman wins national student entrepreneur award

By Tim Ryan
Leader reporter

Nicole Bowman wasn't expecting to pick up one of the highest honors awarded by the U.S. Department of Commerce when she attended the Minority Economic Development Conference last month.

Just getting to the conference is an honor in itself. Only 75 attendees are chosen from across the country and applicants who want to attend go through a rigorous approval process.

Bowman, owner of Shawano-based Bowman Performance Consulting LLC, was not even aware that her name had been put up for consideration for the National Student Entrepreneur of the Year, nominated by American Indian Chamber of Commerce and Wisconsin Minority Business Opportunity Council, as well as the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

So when she won the award she was taken entirely by surprise.

"I was shocked," said Bowman. "And humbly grateful.

I enjoy the work that I do."

The Minority Economic Development Conference is the largest federally sponsored activity held on behalf of minority business enterprises. This is the first time a Wisconsin resident and Native American — Bowman is of Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican descent — has received this award.

The award recognized Bowman for, among other things, more than 12 years of work raising more than \$10 million for organizations that deal with minority and at-risk groups. Two years ago she started her own consulting firm here in Shawano.

Working as a consultant and grant writer, her clients range from local school districts like Shawano-Gresham, Bowler and Menominee Tribal Schools to large, federal agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start, Department of Education and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"I have as much work in state as I do out of state," she said.

Though she spends a lot of time outside the area, she



BOWMAN

decided to settle down in Shawano where she was born and raised. She lives with her husband, David Farrell.

"I came back here for the same reason

I left," Bowman said. "It's quiet."

Bowman has juggled her time between cross-cultural consulting and being a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Administration and expects to complete her dissertation in fall of 2004.

She started Bowman Performance Consulting in 2001.

"I wanted autonomy," she said. "My father was an entrepreneur and I wanted that freedom — the freedom to work on the issues I wanted with the clients I wanted."

The company provides

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national consulting services in the areas of educational research, curriculum development, program evaluation, and organizational development for state, tribal, federal, and private organizations.

BPC also offers professional development training, technical assistance, fund development, and business planning and development services. BPC is certified by the state Department of Public Instruction as an approved supplemental service provider, and by the state Department of Commerce as a minority business enterprise.

Her work for the school districts — which includes Milwaukee Public Schools — involves a lot of research and evaluation, Bowman said.

Much of Bowman's work is aimed at getting the system to work more efficiently when it comes to at-risk or minority students. She said the administration, policy makers and even the teachers often have no idea of the world view of disadvantaged students