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CONTACT:

Rose Berens

218-753-6017, ext 11

rozeberens@yahoo.com

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Release Party Debuts Bois Forte CD Of Ojibwe Language And Song

Teacher Karen Drift And Musician Keith Secola Team Up On Pioneering Project

TOWER, Minn. – Preserving a language can mean saving a culture, so Bois Forte Head Start teacher Karen Drift and national award winning recording artist Keith Secola have teamed up to produce a CD that will preserve common Ojibwe words and phrases all to the echoing beat of Native American music.

The CD, “Anishinabemoin”, is ready for release under the newly created Bois Forte Band of Chippewa Music & Akina Records label. The release party, sponsored by the Bois Forte Heritage Center, will take place from 2-4 p.m. on Jan. 25, at the Heritage Center, located on the grounds of Fortune Bay Resort Casino, during the annual Bois Forte State of the Band proceedings.

“Our people, especially our children, walk a little taller when we celebrate the deeply rooted heritage of our own language and traditions,” said Kevin Leecy, Chairman of the Bois Forte Tribal Government. “Both Congress and former President George H. W. Bush recognized this fact when they passed into law the Native American Language Act back in 1990. Congress agreed that the United States has a responsibility to act together with American Indians to ensure the survival of their culture and languages,” he said.

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Drift is known throughout the state as a champion of the Ojibwe language. She teaches free classes on Tuesday evenings at the Bois Forte Heritage Center. During the summer, you'll find her in her own backyard tutoring adults and children in their native tongue. And she has creatively integrated a traditional Anishinabe curriculum into the Head Start program she helps staff at the Nett Lake School through worksheets, games, puzzles, song and hundreds of translated stories.

Drift elaborated, "I've always wanted to teach little ones. They learn language so easily. The CD is something I've wanted to do for a long time. I had the opportunity when Kevin Koskie, a Bois Forte Tribal Government employee called and suggested we could record the language at his friend John Bank's Thunderstone Cedar Studio, in Mountain Iron. We did the recording, but the project stalled for several months. I was ready to give up and then our Heritage Center Director Rose Berens got Keith Secola involved and the project moved forward again."

Secola, a member of the Bois Forte Band and owner of Akina Music in Tempe, Ariz., is the recipient of many music awards including Best Producer, and he recently won Artist of the Year at the 2006 Native American Music Awards. As a singer/songwriter, Secola's music includes songs in English and Ojibwe, as well as Native American flute, and pow wow, with a mix of influences from native rhythms, rock and americana roots music.

He regularly marshals his significant musical talent in promotions of his Native roots and local causes. Fortune Bay recruited Secola last November when the Resort Casino encouraged customer contributions to help feed those in need. Fortune Bay matched the customer contributions and presented a check at one of two *Feed the Hungry* benefit concerts in Hibbing and Virginia at which Secola performed to raise additional money and food contributions for area food shelves. "This CD project means so much to me," he said during a recent interview. "I enjoyed collaborating with Karen on the project. And I'm excited to see the reaction by the children and their parents to the CD," he said.

“I’ve always been inspired by my Indian language. Maybe because I was brought up in a home where everyone spoke the language.” explained Drift. I believe that right now it’s not our language that’s lost; it’s us, who are lost. You have to learn your language first; everything else will fall into place. We have only twelve Elders left who speak fluently. When we’re gone... Thanks to Keith, the RTC and my granddaughter Larrissa who recorded with me, this CD will help anyone who wants to learn the language.”

The CD will feature the pronunciation of vocabulary words such as household items, colors, numbers, months of the year, etc., as well as short phrases with a conversational emphasis. Anishinabe children, including Drift’s granddaughter Larrissa also contribute with song and drums. The CD will be widely distributed to area schools. Twenty copies have already been ordered by Fond du Lac for their school, according to Drift.

For more information about the release party and the CD, please contact Rose, Rhonda or Bev at the Bois Forte Heritage Center 218-753-6017.

More about FREE Ojibwe language classes:

Karen Drift’s Ojibwe Language Classes are free to the public and all ages are welcome. (Children need to be accompanied by an adult.) Upcoming classes are Tuesday evenings from 7-9 p.m., beginning January 9th.

The Jan. 9th class will be held at the Heritage Center on the grounds of Fortune Bay Resort Casino. Class location will alternate each Tuesday between the Heritage Center and Nett Lake Community Center.

Ojibwe Class Schedule for January 2007:

Jan. 9- Bois Forte Heritage Center, 7-9 p.m.

Jan. 16-Nett Lake Community Center, 7-9 p.m.

Jan. 23- Bois Forte Heritage Center, 7-9 p.m.

Jan. 30- Nett Lake Community Center, 7-9 p.m.

Classes will continue into February, schedule to be announced.

For more information on free Ojibwe classes, call Rhonda or Bev at the Heritage Center, 218-753-6017.

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