

# Valerie Fast Horse



## Article by Danielle Kuhrt

Valerie Fast Horse is on the move. She is the director of Information Technology (IT) of the Coeur d'Alene Reservation in northern Idaho. Supported by a team of 16 full-time staff members, her job is to create and apply new ideas for the 2,000 residents who live there.

In 2002, as an employee of the Coeur d'Alene tribe, Valerie wrote a \$2.8 million federal grant that helped provide broadband access to the reservation. Her tribe donated the rest of the funds for the \$3.5 million broadband network that now covers 345,000 acres. She then helped build a \$280,000 Community Technology Center that is free for users and houses 40 computers, as well as providing computer classes and video production.

Valerie believes in the power of information, and her goal is to preserve the tribe's heritage and culture through technology. She has created Rezkast.com, a website that allows Native Americans across the U.S. and Canada to network, sharing stories, videos and songs. Rezkast has approximately 1,700 members and is seeking to start a Native American radio station — KWIS FM 88.3 — that would allow families in rural areas to receive weather reports, news stories and culture programs such as music and storytelling in their native language, Snchitsu'umshtsn.

Friend and nominator Sonya Rosario describes Valerie as “just dynamic.” She says, “She has the heart of a lion. [Valerie is] an incredible women and an incredible asset to Idaho, not just to her tribe.”

In fact, Valerie has a record of service extending far beyond Idaho. She served in the U.S. Army, where she worked in the information management division for 10 years while on active duty and in the reserves. It was during her stint in the Army when Valerie first realized the opportunities technology could offer her tribe. After completing her military service, she attended North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene, where she graduated with a degree in computer science.

Although Valerie has served two three-year terms on the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Council, she does not seek further re-election, because her work as director of IT keeps her too busy to effectively manage both jobs. However, she has a great deal of respect for the Council, and says that when she comes before it to request approval for a new project and hears the word “no,” she turns that into “not yet.”

Right now, Valerie is working on a plan to extend fiber optics, the fastest speed of Internet available, across the reservation. The Council was at first reluctant because of the \$12.5 million price tag, but this doesn't dampen Valerie's spirit. As Sonya points out, “[Valerie's] skills in technology have put the tribe and its people in a wonderful place.”