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Media Release

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NATIONAL INDIAN GAMING ASSOCIATION (NIGA) CONCLUDES 16th ANNUAL TRADE SHOW WITH AWARD CEREMONY HONORING FORMER SALT RIVER PIMA-MARICOPA INDIAN COMMUNITY PRESIDENT IVAN MAKIL

(Phoenix, Ariz., March 28) – Last night, Ivan Makil, former President of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community in Arizona and a life-long Native rights advocate, was honored with the National Indian Gaming Association’s (NIGA) 2007 Wendell Chino Humanitarian Award.

Wendell Chino served 43 years as Chairman of the Mescalero Apache Tribe in New Mexico and is remembered for his leadership and humanitarianism. After his death, NIGA created the award that carries his name.

The award ceremony, which was a highlight of “Indian Gaming ‘07” – NIGA’s 16th annual meeting and trade show – was hosted by actor Adam Beach (Saulteaux). Beach began the evening by welcoming Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano. Beach also welcomed veteran Native actor Wes Studi (Cherokee) as a special evening guest.

“The heart and soul of the tribal and state relationship has to be a mutual respect and giving real meaning to the phrase government-to-government relationship,” noted Napolitano, as she reminisced about her years in public service and her support of the Native peoples of Arizona.

The award ceremony was preceded by the swearing in NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr., to his fourth consecutive term, and Lynn “Nay” Valbuena to her sixth consecutive term as NIGA secretary. The swearing in was conducted by the Honorable Charleen Jackson, Chief Judge of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation.

“This is your night and our best trade show ever,” said Stevens, following his swearing in ceremony. “I’d like to thank our constituency, our Member Tribes and my brother, Ivan Makil.”

“I’m just so blessed to be elected by all of you in Indian Country,” said Valbuena. “The battle is not over...it will be there for a long time...generation by generation we must protect our sovereignty.”

Stevens noted that Valbuena is now the longest-serving officer of NIGA, and also recognized former NIGA vice-chairman Danny Tucker as the second longest serving officer of NIGA. Stevens also recognized his 82 year old uncle; former Oneida Nation of Wisconsin Chair, Purcell Powless who was the first elected vice-chair of the National Indian Gaming Association.

Wendell Chino's son Mark, the current Mescalero Tribal Chairman, presented the award to Makil. The ceremony was marked with spoken and filmed tributes, and special gifts also presented to Stevens and Valbuena.

"Ivan Makil has accomplished many things for his people, including leading the standoff with state troops over Indian gaming," noted Studi (Cherokee).

Former President of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) Makil is a partner with Generation Seven Strategic Partners, LLC. With expertise in government affairs, business, and economic development, the company serves as a conduit between tribal governments and non-tribal entities. Makil recently created a Native-owned venture capital fund to advance tribal economies and in partnership with Arizona State University, he developed an innovative training program for newly elected tribal leaders.

As President of SRPMIC, Makil was elected to three consecutive terms where he helped guide the business and social development of the Community. Under his leadership, SRPMIC became a nationally recognized model for business enterprises, land use planning and overall economic development.

In 1996 Makil oversaw the first ballot initiative for Indian gaming ever attempted in Arizona and the U.S. and its success enabled five tribes to acquire gaming compacts in Arizona. In 2000, Makil chaired the statewide ballot initiative, which enabled Arizona tribes to renew their gaming compacts.

A nationally recognized leader, Makil is a former member of the International Founder's Council for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. In 1994, Makil was one of 10 tribal leaders representing 550 tribes asked to present at the first White House meeting of Indian tribes. This was the first time tribes were invited to the White House since the 1800s. In 1998, he played a significant role in developing and presenting the first "White House Conference on Building Economic Self-Determination in Indian communities."

Makil has received numerous awards including the National Congress of American Indian's Youth Leadership program, Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, and the National Indian Gaming Association. He was selected by Valley Leadership as Man of the Year for Phoenix and was named by the Phoenix Business Journal as one of the 100 most influential people in Arizona. In addition to being a political and business leader, Makil is a professional jazz musician, who plays the trumpet and guitar.

"I've had the opportunity of working with my brother, Ivan Makil, over the past 15 years and it's certainly been a great pleasure. He has served his people, and all of Indian country, in a variety of capacities ranging from working with our youth to our elders," said Stevens.

“I want to thank the Creator who has always given us the strength, courage and wisdom that all of you leaders possess and use for our people,” said Makil.

“I also want to thank all of the tribal leaders and those of you who fight for our causes...I thank you for this honor and I am humbled by it,” said Makil, who also noted the countless number of Native families who sacrifice time with their loved ones to leave home and spend so much time fighting the endless battles on behalf of Indian peoples.

“All of the effort we make is about respect, -- I always tell my sons that you don’t need to be a millionaire or have a great job – what’s important in Indian Country is to be a good person, to respect other people and yourself,” said Makil. “The respect and love that we share as Indian people is really the foundation that will create the success we have.”

“The battle isn’t over, there’s still more (that needs to be done),” said Makil, who added that unity of all Indian peoples was of the utmost importance. “We can be one of most influential entities in this country if we just get together and do it,” said Makil. “We need to call upon our elders and our families to support us.”

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The National Indian Gaming Association is a non-profit trade association comprised of 184 American Indian Nations and other non-voting associate members. The mission of NIGA is to advance the lives of Indian people -- economically, socially and politically. NIGA operates as a clearinghouse and educational, legislative and public policy resource for tribes, policymakers and the public on Indian gaming issues and tribal community development.