



Rebuilding
Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE DAY 2009 A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE STEVENS, JR., CHAIRMAN



Chairman Stevens presents the Nike N7 shoe to Phoenix Suns forward Amar'e Stoudemire as part of the pre-game Native American Heritage Day activities of the Phoenix Suns game against the Memphis Grizzlies.

Sagoli Swakweku - Greetings from Washington, D.C.! Today, America is officially celebrating Native American Heritage Day 2009. From Indian Country, we thank President Obama, the Senate and the House for establishing this important national commemorative day.

People from all walks of life, native and non-native alike, are beginning to recognize Native American Heritage Day in many different ways. Schools have planned special curricula for children and

traditional gatherings are being held throughout the country. Local and national museums, like the Smithsonian's National

Museum of American Indians, are hosting special events, exhibits and films. These efforts are designed to emphasize the cultural and historical contributions of Native Americans to the United States. More importantly, Native American Heritage Day as a national holiday is an opportunity to educate the public about the true history and the rich culture, traditions and heritage of the First Americans.

As chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association, and a proud citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, I greatly appreciate the efforts made today to better educate the general public on the heritage of tribes and their communities. More importantly, I am profoundly grateful for the generations of dedicated tribal leaders who fought to maintain, strengthen and, in some cases, rebuild the way of life that was constantly threatened throughout the so-called assimilation process. These brave men and women leaders, representing all of our sovereign governments, along with the perseverance of Indian people throughout their communities, are responsible for keeping our heritage alive and passing it down to each successive generation despite the tremendous challenges and obstacles put before them.



The Native Alaskan Dance Group joins the Native American Heritage Day celebration at the NMAI in Washington, D.C.

Now that the day is here and being celebrated, what are we observing? We are observing the fact that upon the arrival of the European visitors, Native Americans were already harvesting the crops that today comprise two-thirds of the crops under cultivation worldwide as they greeted the Europeans with good faith, extending aid, peaceable accord and good will that set the table for the Thanksgiving holiday we celebrate every year.

Native Americans have made many contributions to our Nation and the World. The concept of zero in mathematics came from South American Indians. The

democratic society we enjoy today was fashioned from the government of the Five Civilized Tribes and the Iroquois Confederacy, just two strong examples of democratic governments among the Native nations in America. Most Americans do not realize that the United States was created in the Native American spirit of independence, strength, adaptability and resilience.

Family values remain a strong asset to Native American people; they are at the core of our determination to survive. Native Americans wear their tribal affiliation like a badge, a symbol of courage, strength and survival. We continue to practice our own traditions, participate in the ceremonies of our ancestors and speak our languages. We go to community churches, serve in state governments and respect our non-Indian neighbors -- all indicia of good citizens. In this respect, it is clear that we are bi-cultural and maintain dual citizenships, which we regard as consistent with our treaties and the U.S. Constitution. The contributions of Native Americans to the American way of life are numerous, but the Native American people never sought praise, only respect as this nation's first sovereigns.

Native Americans have always answered the call of duty in the time-honored tradition of protecting this great country. In all of the combat zones across the globe, throughout history, and in every conflict long before they were citizens of the United States, our Native American warriors were fighting at the frontlines, in record numbers, fighting for the sacred ideal of protecting family, home and nation. Even today, these strong warriors of yesteryear continue to be proud veterans and are strong examples of their service at home through community service, education and dedication.

I encourage all to embrace this opportunity to promote the accurate story of the history of Native America and move this great nation away from the stereotypes and misinformation that have long misrepresented the story of a very proud, honorable and patriotic people.

Native Americans today carry the legacy of our ancestors and are taking the next step of teaching the generations of tomorrow about our survival, dedication and our many contributions. It is a credit to our previous generations that we have this opportunity. They sacrificed immensely to give hope for the dream of a better tomorrow. They envisioned self-determination and prosperity of life. We are the realization of that vision, and we must share the success and

survival of the Native Americans with the rest of the world. We will continue in this generation and future generations to succeed and flourish.



Chairman Stevens joins the Native American Dance Group for a photo at the U.S. Airways Center in Phoenix, Arizona.

For Native American Heritage Day 2009, reflect about Native Americans and what they mean to America. We have always been civilized and educated. We operate our own tribal governments and exercise our sovereignty. We believe in the concept of community and caring for tribal members. We are Americans who enjoy all the same liberties as other citizens, we continue to extend good will to neighbors with cooperation and honor, but we are also warriors who know the importance of protecting and providing for our communities.

Recognition of Native American Heritage Day is powerful because it is an enduring symbol of this country's appreciation and respect for America's First Nations.

In the spirit of our great Native American Warriors,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ernest L. Stevens, Jr.".

Ernest L. Stevens, Jr. Chairman
National Indian Gaming Association