



Rebuilding
Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Deana Jackson
(202) 579-5427
djackson@indiangaming.org

WOMEN TRIBAL LEADERS HONORED AT NIGA MID YEAR



NIGA Sovereignty banquet awardees A. Gay Kingman, recipient of the NIGA Lifetime Achievement Award and John Keiffer Spirit of Sovereignty honoree pose for photos after the banquet.

POJOAQUE, N.M.- September 17, 2009 - The National Indian Gaming Association hosted their Mid-Year Conference at the Buffalo Thunder Resort and Casino on Sept. 15-16, 2009. The conference highlighted the accomplishments of Indian leaders dedicated to the advocacy of Indian sovereignty.

Over 250 people were in attendance from across the country, representing over 60 tribes. They attended training seminars on issues affecting Indian gaming and enjoyed networking opportunities with gaming industry experts and tribal leaders.

On Sept. 15, the Sovereignty Awards Banquet spotlighted two women leaders, both of whom are champions of Tribal sovereignty. Rosemary Morillo, Vice Chairwoman of the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians received the coveted John Keiffer Spirit of Sovereignty Award, while NIGA's Lifetime Achievement Award went to A. Gay Kingman-Wapato, of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe." National Tribal leadership selected these outstanding recipients.

NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens Jr. praised the leadership of both women for their powerful dedication as protectors of Indian country. "We have a lot of great leaders throughout Indian Country," Stevens said. "Rosemary and Gay are two of the best."

"Rosemary has a long list of working accomplishments locally, regionally and nationally. I feel her most treasured accomplishments are in her own community. She wholeheartedly embraces her role in leadership, holding family, youth, and culture near and dear to her heart in every aspect." Chairman Stevens said.

Upon receiving the John Keiffer Spirit of Sovereignty Award, Rosemary Morillo said, "I always take a lot of pride in helping my people, and that is what it is all about. I come from a long line of leadership in my family, so I grew up knowing that helping my community was important, in order to make change." She added, "To be able to accept an award like this is very humbling and I am honored by it."

Morillo made reference to the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians Settlement Act of 2007, which ended a 75-year-old lawsuit over water rights in southern California. "We never gave up," Morillo said. Her dedication, along with the leadership in Soboba helped secure \$29 million for the tribe and up to 2 billion gallons of water a year, ensuring the future water supply of the 6000-acre reservation.

The John Kieffer Spirit of Sovereignty award is named in the honor of John Kieffer, a member of the Spokane Tribe. He was a selfless and dedicated member of the NIGA Executive Committee from 1993 until his untimely death in 1999. Keiffer was instrumental in the development of the modern NIGA structure and dedicated himself to the protection of Indian sovereign rights. In his memory NIGA chooses honorees dedicated to the organization's mission and purpose.

A. Gay Kingman-Wapato was honored with the NIGA Lifetime Achievement Award. Kingman-Wapato is no stranger to Capital hill, where she fought numerous battles for Indian Country alongside her late husband, Tim Wapato, who passed on earlier this year. Chairman Stevens told the crowd, "Gay's continued resiliency to fight to protect Indian sovereignty is an inspiration to all in Indian country."

"I am just a poor girl from the reservation." Explaining that this was a common quote of her late husband Tim Wapato, as she accepted her award. Kingman-Wapato continued, "I have been blessed by opportunities that have come my way all throughout my life. The main lesson I learned is you have to just to keep moving on behalf of tribal sovereignty, because what we do today will impact the future of Indian country."

Kingman-Wapato spoke of the NIGA beginnings. "There is something special to say about NIGA, it was born out of nothing, and it is where it is today because of those that have gone on like my husband Tim Wapato and John Kieffer." She continued, "I am glad that Chairman Stevens, Mark Van Norman and the NIGA Executive board have continued to work hard and take NIGA upwards and foreword to one of the most powerful Indian organizations."

Upon closing, Kingman-Wapato presented NIGA a check to create a NIGA scholarship fund in the memory of her late husband to be established for Native American students interested in pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice or Business.

Before Lumbee entertainer Jana Mashonee took stage, Chairman Stevens shared a closing message of unity and strength. "Honoring these strong beautiful women is a special moment and we can all feel the power of their energy. They truly exemplify the reason we have been successful in leveraging our presence in Washington, D.C. and all throughout Indian country and I am confident that we can continue to count on their strength and experiences as we move forward." Stevens concluded, "There is still a lot to accomplish and we cannot afford to rest. I know together we can successfully move the Indian country agenda forward."

###

About the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) - The National Indian Gaming Association is a nonprofit trade association comprised of 184 American Indian Nations and other nonvoting associate member. 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 resources for tribes, policymakers and the public on Indian gaming issues and tribal community development. For more information, visit www.indiangaming.org.