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Media Release

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The 25th Annual National Indian Gaming Association Convention honors Westerman, Nike and Indian youth

San Diego, Calif. — The 25th Annual National Indian Gaming Association, an organization devoted to promoting and protecting the sovereignty of Indian nations, opened earlier this week with nearly 4,000 registrants from across Indian America.

The opening reception on the roof of San Diego's Hard Rock Café looked back in celebration of the life of Floyd Red Crow Westerman, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Dakota singer, activist and actor; and honored Nike's N7 Foundation, which supports youth athletics across Indian Country.

"Floyd Westerman helped make Indian Country what it is," Ernie Stevens, Jr., the chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association, told a cheering crowd, before playing a song by Westerman, who walked on in 2007.

A highlight of the tribal leader's reception was when Westerman's friends, Ojibwe rocker and bluesman Keith Secola and Oneida comedian Charlie Hill took the stage, to play one of Westerman's signature songs, a round dance. Secola picked the melody on his guitar and sang Westerman's familiar words about being put in boarding school, and Hill kept time with a hand drum. "Floyd was a dynamic leader; he was truly a man who changed America's understanding and appreciation for Indian Country," said Stevens who is Oneida.

The National Indian Gaming Association was founded in 1985 at the birth of modern Indian gaming to provide public policy resources, training and advocacy for American Indian tribes. It is the leading gaming organization for Indian Country, promoting awareness of the ways in which Indian nations and their gaming enterprises support cultural restoration and economic development.

NIGA also operates the Spirit of Sovereignty Foundation, which raised scholarship money earlier in the week through golf tournaments sponsored by the Barona Creek Gold Club, and the Oak Glen and Willow Glen Courses at Sycuan.

During the reception NIGA acknowledged three donations to the Spirit of Sovereignty Foundation totaling \$35,000. They donations came from the Minnesota-based Klas Robinson Q.E.D., which gave \$5,000; the Washington, D.C.-based Holland & Knight, which received \$8,000; and the Sovereignty Golf Tournament, which contributed \$22,000.

NIGA also recognized Nike's N7 Fund for its leadership in providing grants and product donations to community-based organizations that seek to unleash the potential of American Indian and aboriginal youth through sports. Nike launched the fund when it introduced the N7 athletic shoe, which is specially designed to fit American Indian feet. Sam McCracken, the general manager of Nike Native American Business, announced the donation of \$25,000 to the California-based Inter-Tribal Sports.

Other organizations that receive some of the N7 Fund's \$200,000 in annual donations are the Native American Basketball Invitation Foundation, the Notah Begay III Foundation for its Youth Soccer Program and Yellow Bird Inc. for the Fort Robinson Outbreak Spiritual Run.

"What a difference an opportunity to help to change a life of someone young or old," declared N7 Fund board member Tex Hall, of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. He said that the N7 Fund helps fill funding gaps in Indian Country. "When we served in Washington, we had to make very difficult budget decision. Do we want to fund diabetes prevention, or youth sports?"

These decisions shouldn't have to be made, said Ernie Stevens, Jr. That is why the National Indian Gaming Association supports Indian gaming as a means to the self sufficiency of Indian nations.

"We can't do what we need to do in this industry if we don't stand united as Indian nations," Stevens said. "We are celebrating 25 years of the National Indian Gaming Association, and what we are celebrating is our unity of vision in building the Indian gaming industry, and our commitment to making our Indian nations better places for our future generations."

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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.