



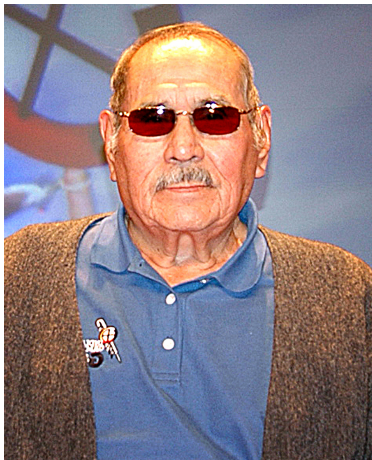
Rebuilding  
Communities  
Through Indian  
Self-Reliance

# Media Release

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **The National Indian Gaming Association mourns the loss of former Oneida Nation of Wisconsin Chairman Purcell Powless**



**WASHINGTON, D.C. - November 8, 2010** - The National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) and Indian Country mourn the loss of a true tribal leader, a man who served his nation as chairman for 23 years. Purcell R. Powless passed into the spirit world leaving behind a legacy of tribal leadership and dedication to the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin. Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr. said his late uncle was an honest man of integrity who preserved tribal sovereignty throughout his political career. Percy, as he was known, was the longest seated chairman in the history of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin. Born on December 25, 1925 in Oneida, Wisconsin, Powless was a blessing from the start. He was born to Mark and Margaret Powless, the second eldest of five children.

Percy was married to Angeline Skenandore Powless in 1946 and they had eight children, 30 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren. Angeline preceded him in death in 2003. In his lifetime Percy saw many needed improvements on the reservation, from the development of basic infrastructure to the creation and sustained enterprise development on the Oneida Nation. For Percy, life on the reservation meant traveling on dirt roads, getting bussed to five different school districts and traveling over 10 miles for health care. There was no industry on the reservation. Tribal members had no sewer and water. The bustling town of Oneida had four taverns, two grocery stores and two gas stations.

Percy attended St. Joseph School in Oneida and later Pipestone Indian School. He would eventually graduate from Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota. In the 1950s there was a strong boost by the federal government to relocate Indians from the reservations to the cities. The government paid for relocation expenses and leads for employment. In 1959 Percy took advantage of the opportunity and moved his wife and five children to Chicago for a new life.

The life of an ironworker meant Percy would help build some of the most recognizable constructions in America, including the Sears Tower in Chicago and the Mackinaw Bridge in

Michigan. By the time 1967 came into view, the new chairman of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin was none other than Purcell R. Powless, the same man who left the reservation in 1959 in search of brighter opportunities. What Percy brought back from the city was knowledge and real world experiences, invaluable commodities that opened the way for an improvement in the quality of life for the Oneida Tribe.

When he was first elected, Percy was met by a nation with little money and an unemployment rate on the reservation hovering around 60 percent. He returned home from Chicago to a home with no plumbing, sewer or any of the modern conveniences the city offered. He relied on a wood stove for heat and had to survive the elements like the rest of the tribal members. This firsthand experience of reservation conditions shaped the course of his chairmanship.

In 1976 under Percy's leadership, the Oneida Nation moved two initiatives forward – one to build a nursing home for Oneida elders and the other to subsidize the maintenance and operation of a newly acquired community recreation facility – that forever changed the face of the tribe. Funding for the community center was found in bingo, which would become the seeds to the tribal self-determination found in Indian gaming. With the help of several dedicated and hardworking women the bingo hall was transformed into one of the most lucrative economic initiatives ever experienced by any tribe in Wisconsin.

By 1981, Percy took a break from leading the tribe after first taking the helm in 1967. Percy's brief hiatus lasted for 18 months before he returned to office in 1982. In Oct. 1988 the tribe embarked upon casino games on the reservation after the enactment of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. By the end of the month, Percy already contacted former Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson to compact for class III gaming in Oneida. Three years later, the State of Wisconsin and the Oneida Nation concluded a compact supporting the expansion into class III gaming for the Oneida Nation.

In 1991 Percy retired from tribal government for good, leaving behind a nation peaking in economic and social development. The Oneida Nation now had a nursing home, health clinic, police department, social services, communications department, elementary school, industrial park, convenience store, tobacco enterprise, hotel, housing, elderly services, educational programs, day care and fitness center. The reservation land base increased to 6,000 acres and the Oneida Language Preservation Program focused on the importance of retaining Oneida culture for the future generations.

Chairman Stevens and NIGA salute your dedication to the Oneida Tribe and for humble service in Indian Country. Thank you for your service and God bless.

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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](http://www.indiangaming.org).