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FORT MCDOWELL YAVAPAI NATION CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF GAMING

Opening of Ba'Ja Bingo in 1984 paved the way for the now 26 Indian casinos owned and operated by 16 Arizona tribes throughout the state

FORT MCDOWELL , Ariz. – Oct. 18, 2024 – This October 29 will mark the 40-year anniversary of the introduction of gaming in Arizona, an initiative led by the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation when they opened Ba'Ja Bingo in 1984.

The tribal council president at the time, Dr. Clinton M. Pattea, helped lead the way for the success of tribal gaming not just in Arizona but throughout the U.S. His vision for the future of tribal gaming continues to help guide planning and decision making today.

Dr. Pattea was the father of Sandra Pattea who was inaugurated as president of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation this February. Her grandfather also served on the tribal council, illustrating a multi-generational legacy of service and dedication to the community.

The history of gaming in Arizona

In the early 1980s, after a 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decision eliminated legal obstacles, some tribes around the nation began offering bingo in order to generate revenue. This included the Seminole Tribe of Florida who opened a bingo hall in 1979, and the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin who followed suit shortly thereafter.

The Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation was the first Arizona tribe to offer bingo, starting in 1982. In 1984, they opened Ba'Ja Bingo, the first bingo parlor in Arizona – on the site of the former Fort McDowell Casino – to create new jobs and generate much-needed revenue for the tribe. It was an enormous success right from the beginning. Over time, the facility was greatly expanded to accommodate slot machines, card tables, restaurants, and more.

Gaming today

Fort McDowell led the way in gaming in Arizona with the opening of Ba' Ja Bingo 40 years ago, and established the legal and market foundations for future expanded gaming in the Phoenix market. Today, there are 28 Indian casinos owned and operated by 16 Arizona tribes throughout the state – the Phoenix market will soon contain 10 Las Vegas-style casinos alone – showing how far gaming has come over the past four decades.

The new state-of-the-art casino at the We-Ko-Pa Casino Resort, unveiled in October 2020, offers 930 of the most popular slot machines; a variety of table games including blackjack, poker and roulette; sports betting at WKP Sportsbook; and bingo in a 100% smoke-free room that comfortably seats 750. While

bingo represents only a small portion of the total gaming revenue, the tribe remains very loyal to the game that started it all for them.

While many tribal members enjoy playing, most of their bingo players are non-Indians. Bingo remains very popular, particularly among older generations, and continues to provide good jobs for tribal members as well as non-Indians.

“ Given our location and small size, it’s always been difficult to implement successful economic development strategies that provide employment for our people, generate revenue to support our tribal government, and provide essential services to our tribal members,” said Sandra Pattea, president of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation. “Gaming was a form of entertainment that we felt could anchor other hospitality businesses we had been planning. Our We-Ko-Pa Resort, We-Ko-Pa Golf Club, Eagle View RV Park and Fort McDowell Adventures all contribute to the growth of the We-Ko-Pa Casino and vice versa.”

During her first six months in office, Pattea has focused on Indian gaming, casino operations, government department operations, enterprise and government budget oversight and budget allocation, monthly regular tribal council meeting with tribal members, and numerous local, state and federal government meetings.

“To be president of my tribe means that I am following in the footsteps of my father and grandfather who both served on the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Tribal Council,” added Pattea. “It is my hope that with my years of professional work experience, I will bring new ideas and lead to make changes that will benefit my community.”

About the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation

The Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation is an 880-member Native American tribe that calls Central Arizona’s upper Sonoran Desert home. Located to the northeast of Phoenix within Maricopa County, Arizona, the 40-square mile reservation is a small part of the ancestral territory of the once nomadic Yavapai people, who hunted and gathered food in a vast area of Arizona’s desert lowlands and mountainous Mogollon Rim country.

The tribe operates a variety of successful enterprises including the We-Ko-Pa Casino Resort, We-Ko-Pa Golf Club, Fort McDowell Adventures, Eagle View RV Resort, Baja Gas, Yavapai Materials and the Tribal Farm.