



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 30, 2009

CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

OFFICE – 928-871-7917

CELL – 928-309-8532

pressoffice@opvp.org

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, First Lady Vikki Shirley honor NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr., at expansion of Fire Rock Casino

CHURCHROCK, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., Vice President Ben Shelly and First Lady Vikki Shirley welcomed the chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association to the expansion of the Navajo Nation's Fire Rock Casino here on Saturday.

NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr., was honored by President Shirley before 200 people for his contributions to the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Diné Nation.

"Not only has he been a strong leader and advocate for Indian gaming, but he is also been very generous," the President said. "He has over the past years donated \$40,000 to the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Diné Nation through his *Spirit of Sovereignty*."

President Shirley said the donations have been used to purchase toys and clothing during the holidays for children in need, as well as provide funding for meals and transportation for Boys & Girls club members.

The President said Chairman Stevens' leadership of the National Indian Gaming Association has helped to secure the rightful place of all gaming tribes at the negotiation table regarding legislative and regulatory gaming issues. He said he has fought to protect Native Nations' full rights under the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to prevent the erosion of tribal sovereignty.

"His advocacy has kept tribal government voices strong on Capitol Hill," the President said. "This results in a direct impact on the success of Indian economic

development through gaming, raising the standard of living for all our Native brothers and sisters."



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., presented NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr., with a plaque, a sport coat embroidered with a Navajo Nation seal and Fire Rock Casino logo, and Fire Rock Bulova watch.

Chairman Stevens said he was honored to visit Navajoland, see the Tohatchi veterans proudly post the colors, and hear the Navajo language spoken throughout the day.

"What I'm doing is what our communities said to do, to stand by our sovereignty and to stand by our young people," he said.

Bringing them together was the celebration of the success and expansion of the four-month-old casino, which figures from New Mexico now show to be the most successful in the state with the highest usage rate per machine per hour.

The casino added 133 new slot machines which is expected to increase revenues by 15-to-20 percent. It is also expected to add 20 more jobs, including slot supervisors, auditors, and front line employees.

"We set out early on to make sure that we do things right," the President said. "This means ensuring that our gaming operation is purely Navajo-controlled, meaning that we're using our own monies. That way 100 percent of the revenues generated are used for our gaming operations and for our Navajo people, and we're not giving our money away to an outside management company."

Sean McCabe, chairman of the Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise Board of Directors, said the board was committed to quickly bringing the Navajo Nation three more facilities that will amount to \$350 million of investment returned to the Nation. Once accomplished, he said that will amount to some 4,000-to-5,000 jobs.



President Shirley greets guests to the new gaming room following the ribbon cutting for the new room.

President Shirley thanked several people for the hard work to make the casino a success.

Among them were Robert Winter, CEO of the Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise, his staff, and the our casino employees, Sean McCabe and the members of the Gaming Enterprise board, Lisa Tom, acting executive director of the Gaming Regulatory Office and her staff, and the Navajo Nation Council and Economic Development Committee for its oversight and support for our gaming initiative.

President Shirley and Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly welcome NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr., to the Navajo Nation's Fire Rock Casino in Churchrock, N.M. The casino's slot machines have been determined to be the most successful in New Mexico after only four months of operation.

