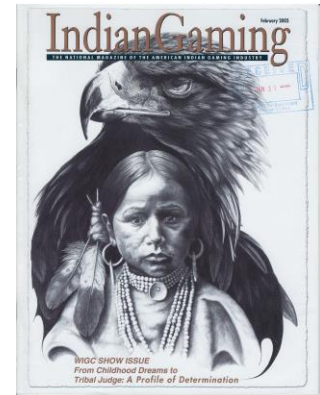


This article was published in the February 2002 edition of *Indian Gaming*



University Forum Educates Non-Indians

How do you educate hundreds of non-Indians about Indian sovereignty and break a few stereotypes at the same time? Hold a forum. That is exactly what San Diego State University did in November 2001. The brainchild of Presidential Fellow and former State Assemblywoman, Denise Moreno Ducheny, the forum presented “Beyond Casinos: Indian Sovereignty in the 21st Century.”

“I wanted to create something useful, something meaningful. In my work as a State Assemblywoman, I became acquainted with the tribes in my district. I saw how much there is to sovereignty. I also realized how little those around me knew about sovereignty,” offered Ducheny, “Too many people see the Casinos and don’t understand that is not what sovereignty is all about.”

Setting out with an agenda to educate as many as possible, Ms. Ducheny approached the University with the concept. Dr. Lou Rea, Chairman of the Public Administration Department was eager to oblige. “Our job is to educate. What a great way to learn about the leadership of Indian Tribes in Southern California and to begin our path in understanding sovereignty. Every step towards understanding is a step away from ignorance.”

Hosted by the University’s Department of Public Administration, the forum was kicked off by California’s Lt. Governor, Cruz Bustamante, and featured special guests from four sovereign nations, including Anthony Pico from the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, Steve Banegas from the Barona Tribe, Mary Belardo of Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, and Richard Milanovich of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

Over 400 students, scholars, and professionals from the San Diego community sat spellbound as they listened to the challenges facing Indian Country today. Many were captivated, as speakers reflected upon the atrocities that were and continue to be characteristic of the burdensome plight of Native Americans. The Lt. Governor, Indian leadership, and featured speakers shared a strong sentiment that the barriers to Indian sovereignty, which have been overcome in the decades passed, have served to strengthen the resolve of American Indians to protect their sovereignty and build strong communities for the future.

“While so much has been gained over the past few years, there is so much to loose if we don’t fight for our sovereignty. Helping to educate non-Indian leaders, students, and teachers is one very important step in winning that fight,” asserted former Tribal Chairman, Anthony Pico. “The forum was a great start to the education process and will help shape the foundation for the new curriculum to be presented in California’s schools,” comments Pico, referring to the newly adopted state educational bill that now requires California Indian history to be included in the public school curriculum.

Many success stories were shared that day that changed how many view Indian Sovereignty. “I realize that it’s not about Casinos—it’s about freedom to care for yourself, your community, and your children’s future,” commented one student in class the following week. “I went to the forum because I had to but I left learning about a whole element of life and nationalism that I never new existed,” stated a graduate student.

Featured speakers for the program were Michael Connolly of the Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians and Environmental Consultant, Dr. Joely De La Torre, Professor of American Indian Studies at San Francisco Sate University, and Dr. Penny Culbreth-Graft, San Diego State University Lecturer and Tribal Government Manager for Viejas Indian Reservation. Topics for the evening featured Indian culture and families in the new millennium, taxation and regulatory impediments to tribal governance, and sovereignty and management from the inside out. Two academic papers were produced for the forum.

The forum was sponsored by Pacific Bell, Price Charities, Galinson Family Foundation. Secondary sponsors were Barona Band of Mission Indians, Community Health Group, Tosco Corporation, Boeing, and Chevron.

For more information concerning the forum, contact the Department of Public Administration, San Diego State University, (619) 594-----.