

National Indian Gaming Association Honors San Manuel Chairwoman Lynn "Nay" Valbuena with the 2018 Tim Wapato Sovereign Warrior Award



Las Vegas, NV – April 23, 2018 – The Cultural event highlighted the Wednesday evening of Indian Gaming 2018 with the traditional dances that took to the stage as at the Westgate Las Vegas Resort.

Joe Garcia, former President of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) led the attendees in prayer to begin the dance exhibitions that opened up the cultural night, which included groups from the Puyallup Family Canoe Dancers from Puyallup, Washington, the Oneida Warrior Smoke Dance group from Oneida, Wisconsin, and the internationally acclaimed Yaaw Tei Yi Dancers from Juneau, Alaska, who have been the anchors to the cultural event for many years.

The traditional dances led up the presentation of the 8th Annual Tim Wapato Sovereign Warrior Award to San Manuel Band of Mission Indians Chairwoman Lynn "Nay" Valbuena on the eve of the anniversary of the passing of the late Tim Wapato.

In speaking of Tim Wapato, NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens said, "Tim was one of the most special warriors of our time. We talked about the history of NIGA, and that story leads to Tim and Gay Wapato who were tasked with establishing an Indian gaming presence in Washington, DC. He was always ready to go to work; always ready to defend Indian country. Tonight, we are honoring the memory of Tim Wapato."

NIGA Chairman Emeritus, Rick Hill and Gay Kingman-Wapato, the wife and family members of the late Tim Wapato and Dr. Michael Marchand, Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, joined NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr., on stage to present the coveted award to Chairwoman Valbuena.

Gay Kingman said, "We are honoring a lady that has spent 40 years in that battle protecting sovereignty. She has been a leader not only for her tribe, but regionally and nationally, with poise and grace, we honor Lynn because she has always stood firm on the front lines protecting tribal sovereignty."

NIGA Chairman Emeritus Rick Hill also commended on Valbuena's leadership, "In the spirit that she has, as well as the strength and power she carries, she always works for her community and Indian country."

Chairwoman Valbuena was joined by her husband Steve as well as her grandson and great grand-daughter on stage to accept the award and said, "I am so honored and humbled. Going back to the 90's when I first met Tim, we clicked automatically because of our mutual career's we held in our tenure in police work. We all mentored each other and worked together to educate not only the legislature but the public. In order to succeed, it is important that you have that passion, and that is what we all shared."

She continued, "I accept this award tonight not because of me, or I, I accept because it is about us and what we did together – we have always had strength in numbers, always fighting for what is right, and that is what we must celebrate tonight."

Valbuena has been in tribal politics more than 40 years. She has been active in state and national Native American affairs over a career that began in 1974 with her first role as San Manuel Housing Commissioner providing oversight for the housing program on the reservation. Over the past 26 years, Lynn has held the positions of Chairwoman, Vice Chairwoman, and Secretary/Treasurer of the San Manuel Business Committee. She is currently serving a third consecutive term as Chairwoman.

Valbuena served as secretary of the National Indian Gaming Association for 14 years before retiring from the office in 2011. In 2015, Valbuena was inducted into the Gaming Hall of Fame by the American Gaming Association (AGA).

She has served as Chairwoman of the Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations (TASIN), a regional tribal organization in southern California established in 1995, since

its inception 23 years ago. She is also a former trustee of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC.

Lynn currently serves as a trustee for the Autry National Center based in Los Angeles, California, and is serving in her 23rd year as a delegate to the National Congress of American Indians, and her 18th year as a member of the American Indian Chamber of Commerce California, Advisory Council. San Manuel was the first Tribe to join the Chamber and has maintained its membership since then. She is also on the Board of Directors for the Northern Arizona University Foundation, Flagstaff, Arizona.

Tim Wapato, who passed on in April 2009, was a citizen of the Wenatchee Band of the Colville Confederated Tribes in Washington State. He retired from the Los Angeles Police Department in 1979 and went on to be the executive director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and in 1989 he was appointed Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans. Following his federal service, he served as the first Executive Director of the National Indian Gaming Association.

The Tim Wapato Sovereign Warrior Award was established by NIGA and Wapato's family and is presented to a member of our tribal community who shares the passion and drives that Tim Wapato had for Tribal Sovereignty and all people throughout Indian country.