

The Charlie Hill Spirit Award to be Presented to NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr.

Washington, DC – The family of the late Charlie Hill will honor the Chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association, Ernie Stevens, Jr. with the Charlie Hill Spirit Award at the Indian Gaming 2017 Tradeshow and Convention to be held at the San Diego Convention Center in San Diego, April 10 – 13, 2017.

The Charlie Hill Spirit Award, established by the National Indian Gaming Association and the family members of the late Native American Comedian four years ago, recognizes the positive impacts by an individual to Indian communities and will be presented to NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr at the Chairman's Welcome Reception on April 10, 2017, at the Hard Rock San Diego.

The award is termed a "spirit" award and is in honor of the outstanding work and commitment to furthering the quality of life of Indian people, which was one of the late comedian's greatest passions. As a stand-up comedian Mr. Hill's quick wit, humor, and Native wisdom touched all of our spirits and reminded us that we could change the world one laugh at a time.

NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr said, "I am truly honored to be recognized by Charlie's family. He had such a real passion for life and presented that passion through his greatest skill of making people laugh." Stevens continued, "Charlie and I were always at each other. He knew so much about the world around us especially as it relates to sports and politics. Initially, I was surprised at his knowledge; later I looked forward to our exchanges. While most of it was teasing and scrutiny I always learned and /or was pressed to do my research just to be sure he wasn't tricking or misleading me. I really miss those lengthy verbal sparring matches. It is my privilege to receive this award in Charlie's memory."

As Chairman of NIGA, Stevens has for sixteen years served as the national spokesman for the Indian gaming industry. In this role, he has worked to educate Congress, the media, and the public about the positive impacts of Indian gaming on tribal and nearby communities. Stevens is also responsible for shaping policy initiatives that have the potential to impact the industry. He has testified before Congress on a number of topics from Internet gaming to proposed amendments to the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA). In addition to his role as spokesman, Stevens has worked to build consensus among NIGA's diverse 184 Member Tribes, and is often quoted as saying, "Our membership is our strength, and we are strongest when our voice is unified."

He has also succeeded in building strong coalitions with other Indian and non-Indian organizations to help strengthen the industry. In the face of constant challenges, while Stevens has served as Chairman, NIGA has consistently defended any movement in Washington, DC against the Principles of Tribal Sovereignty. Stevens has led the Association and worked to protect tribal sovereignty and strengthen the Indian gaming industry.

Hill, who was a member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, moved on to the Spirit World on December 30, 2013, after a long battle with lymphoma, was an internationally renowned stand-up comedian, actor, and writer. Charlie's prestigious entertainment career included movies such as the "Reel Injun," and "The Big Show." He also made his TV debut on The Richard Pryor Show in the 1970s and has been on Late Night with David Letterman and The Tonight Show.

He and his wife Lenora have four children: daughter, Dine' Nizhoni; daughter, Nasbah; daughter, Nanabah; and son, Nabahe.

Since the creation of the Charlie Hill Spirit Award, NIGA, and the family has recognized other notable leaders such as the late Floyd Westerman through his son Richard Tall Bear Westerman, Keith Secola and Buffy Saint Marie.

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