



Native American Finance Officers Association

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NAFOA Honors Two Pioneers for Lifetime Achievements

Sycuan Capital's Martin Elected to Board

CHICAGO – In honor of their outstanding career-long financial leadership that facilitated the progress and ultimate success of their respective Tribal nations, Dr. Clinton Pattea and Alida Thomas were awarded “Lifetime Achievement Awards” by the Native American Finance Officers Association at NAFOA’s 26th Annual Conference on Sept. 4 at The Palmer House Hilton.

Dr. Pattea, president of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation and a member of the Tribal council for 44 straight years, is known as a visionary at Fort McDowell, and was instrumental in a multitude of capacities in steering the Nation from poverty to prosperity. Ms. Thomas began her career with the Gila River Indian Community in 1982 as a clerk/typist in accounts payable, and five years later was appointed Community treasurer – a position she held for 21 years. It was in large part due to Ms. Thomas’ responsible leadership in that post that enabled GRIC to emerge from a “bleak financial situation” to the success story it is today.

“When I first started we sent our accounting out (to a private firm), and people would say, ‘I wish we had a computer,’” Thomas recalled of her early years there. But Thomas urged that GRIC not overburden itself with debt, and her disciplined management and investment in economic development led Gila River to financial success.

“This was the first time I ever received a national award,” Thomas said of the NAFOA honor. “That’s why I was so grateful. It meant a lot to me to be recognized by financial people.”

NAFOA President Bill Lomax, Senior Portfolio Manager for the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, delivered a speech outlining the “State of Tribal Finance,” in which he spoke about economic conditions affecting Indian Country, NAFOA and NCAI’s joint stance on the Pension Protection Act and tribal access to tax-exempt financing, the housing crisis, energy, the banking industry and the ongoing “credit crunch.”

NAFOA’s conference was attended by nearly 450 delegates, including 240 tribal leaders and finance personnel from 93 tribes and tribal entities. The event was funded by 48 sponsor-participants. Forest County Potawatomi and the Gun Lake Tribe served as Tribal Co-Chairs of the event, while Eagle Opportunity, JP Morgan Chase, Dorsey and Whitney LLP and GVA Marquette Advisors were corporate Co-Chairs.

“I was elated to have so many tribal leaders and finance team members joining us in Chicago,” Lomax said. “It’s clear once again that NAFOA is the go-to organization for all financial and accounting matters related to tribes, their business enterprises, and their investments. Indian Country does not operate in a vacuum, so having many tribes from across the nation and the leaders in the financial services industry convening to share their knowledge and experiences is immensely valuable to all.



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“NAFOA continues to act as the primary Indian Country finance and accounting educational resource as well as the financial watchdog guarding Tribal financial sovereignty. Our membership is growing dramatically and, thanks to all of our devoted sponsors and participants, we are beginning to enjoy the degree of funding that will enable us to start doing so much more to benefit all of our members.”

Winning election to NAFOA’s five-member board of directors as 1st vice president was VaRene Martin, principal relationship manager at Sycuan Capital Management (Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation). Martin is a member of the Thlopthlocco Tribal Town of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma.

“It is an honor and privilege to have been elected 1st Vice President of NAFOA,” Martin said. “NAFOA and its continued success has been one of my passions. I have proudly told NAFOA’s story as I travel throughout Indian Country encouraging the Tribes to use the education that NAFOA offers to build the financial strength of tribal governments and their enterprises. It is truly a blessing to be a member of this Board.”

Re-elected NAFOA board members were Secretary Terry Cornelius (member and Chief Financial Advisor of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin), and Treasurer Ryan Claw (member of the Navajo Nation and Treasurer for the Tohono O’odham Nation).

Also highlighting the conference were keynote addresses by Elouise Cobell and NCAI President Joe Garcia. The event began with a two-hour discussion on how tribes and their business enterprises can navigate the current economic downturn. The panel was led by Mike Lettig of KeyBank, and participants included: Patrick Arbor, former chairman of the Chicago Board of Trade; Ron Allen, chairman at Jamestown S’Klallam and president of the Washington Indian Gaming Association; Elke Chenevey of Merrill Lynch; Lou Frillman of GVA Marquette Advisors; Mark Jarboe of Dorsey & Whitney LLP; David Johnson of the U.S. Department of Interior; Bonnie Pullen of Colusa Indian Community; and Lance Morgan of Ho-Chunk Inc.

NAFOA is a non-profit, 501(c)3 financial educational organization governed by a five-member, all-Native board of directors, elected by membership.

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