

Gaming Revenue Funds Tribal School for the Meskwaki Nation

The Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa (The Meskwaki Nation) owns and operates Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel located in Tama, Iowa. The Nation started their gaming ventures with a bingo hall located at the Nation's community center gymnasium in 1987. As the gaming prospects in Indian Country grew, so did the Meskwaki Nation's opportunities. The Meskwaki Bingo Casino opened on New Year's Eve 1992 as a small facility with some used slot machines, a small blackjack pit and a bingo hall. Today, Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel is a destination for the Midwest with 404 hotel rooms, a 500 seat bingo hall, over 1,350 slot machines, all live games including a pari-mutuel betting and the Meskwaki Veterans Convention Center.

Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel has developed and grown the gaming facility not only because of the economic need of the Meskwaki Nation, but also to ensure a future that offers opportunity. Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel also makes sure that there are resources to enhance to physical and mental health of the 1,300 members of the Nation and guarantees that the Meskwaki Nation will endure. The key to this endurance as a people and as a Nation is the support and development of the Nation's most precious resource – their children.

The tribal gaming revenue has given the Nation the opportunity to build and maintain a local school system. The Meskwaki Settlement School serves grades kindergarten through 12 with early childhood development education as well. Early childhood includes programs for three and four year olds. Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel has been the catalyst that has allowed the Meskwaki Nation to realize their dreams for their children. The tribes gaming endeavors has given the Nation opportunities to secure their own future through the education of their young.

The first phase of the development of the Meskwaki Settlement School system was to replace the old dilapidated Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary school with a new facility. In the late 1990s, construction began for a new Meskwaki Elementary school designed to serve kindergarten through eighth grades. The school opened in 2001 with funds secured by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and revenue generated by the casino. The Meskwaki Elementary School served approximately 180 students with the Tama County school system taking Meskwaki students to their



Overhead of the Meskwaki Elementary School

middle and high school years. With the opening of the elementary school and the continued success of Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel, the Nation continued the work of establishing a complete school system on the Nation's land.

Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel became more successful, and the facility grew to the point where the tribal leadership determined it was time to complete the school system by expanding the school up to the 12th grade. In 2006, construction began on a state-of-the-art middle and high school facility. Funding for this project was secured via the tribe's gaming revenue. The BIA commitment to the tribe's project was \$4 million, with the tribe committing a majority of the funding with \$23 million provided from gaming revenue. The Meskwaki Nation wanted a middle and high school that offered every opportunity for each student to succeed. This meant that for the Nation to determine their own destiny by educating their young with their Meskwaki heritage as a foundation, the Nation needed full control of the educational pursuits of the young with the Nation committing a major portion of the funding.

The design of the addition to the elementary school had to meet criteria which reflected the values of the Meskwaki Nation. The Nation used the same architect used to design the elementary building. The architectural firm was Leo A Daly out of Omaha, Nebraska. The magnificent building has 108,000 sq. ft. in a natural setting. The building holds a silver certificate as a LEED building. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. LEEDS Certification means all materials used in

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the building, both during construction and operation, are recyclable. The building features geothermal heating/cooling with indirect lighting from natural sources as well as low energy lighting.

The Nation wanted a state-of-the-art learning facility that provides a safe, comfortable learning environment. They accomplished that goal. The building has a security system with 72 cameras and an intruder alarm system. Computer access is through a blade system allowing students to have a virtual desk top in any location in the building. All classrooms have built in video projectors allowing the teachers to project from computers, video players, DVD players or document cameras. Teachers have virtually any resource and teaching aid needed for any subject. Students can get all of the basics for an education preparing them for college, as well as many trades, such as welding and wind energy. The Meskwaki School Board has set the standard for core courses at four years of English, Math, Science and Social Studies. This educational standard is higher than what is required in the state of Iowa school systems.

Preserving the Meskwaki Culture is a priority for the Nation. The Nation has resources available from Indian gaming that provide tools to protect their identity. Language preservation programs have been developed and incorporated into the school system. Indian gaming nations have identified cultural preservation as a priority, and revenue from Indian gaming allows for the Nations to realize what is at stake and understand the efforts it will take to secure their place in the future.

Along with the academics, the Meskwaki Settlement School has a strong cultural program where the students learn their language, history, traditions, dances and ceremonies. Meskwaki Culture classes are required of all students. The students who attend the Meskwaki Settlement School have the definitive advantage with the state-of-the-art facility, the individual attention each student receives, and a foundation of the Meskwaki heritage upon which the students can build. The Meskwaki traditions and values are part of the school system and this allows the students to

receive an education that becomes part of their spirit. The Meskwaki Settlement School students can achieve the balance in their lives that their formal education and Meskwaki Heritage provides.

Today, the Meskwaki Settlement School has an enrollment of over 300 students with pre-school and early childhood development programs. The student-to-teacher ratio for the all grade levels averages one teacher for every 15 students. The success of the Meskwaki Nation’s gaming endeavors has provided the next generation an educational opportunity that cannot be found in the local community school district. Indian gaming allows for the Nation to meet the individual needs of the students and provide individual attention so each student understands their own potential.

The Meskwaki Settlement School is only one story of the success and achievements of Indian gaming. Indian gaming has allowed tribes to expand their infrastructures to support tribal projects such as a school system, enhance health and social services, provide funding for adult learners, and develop tools and services that preserve the language and heritage. With Indian gaming comes a stronger sovereignty of the Nation and establishment of influence within the surrounding communities and at the state and federal levels. With the positive economic impact that comes from Indian gaming, tribes cannot only use their resources to provide a healthier, optimistic future for their children but can also develop relationships that go beyond their borders, enhancing the tribes presence in a positive, constructive manner. This promotes a sense of healing that comes from the economic benefits that all Indian gaming tribes provide for the local communities. Indian gaming has generated opportunities and possibilities that no federal stimulus has ever provided and all tribes should work together to protect what has been gained. Our children deserve every advantage and benefit Indian gaming can provide. ♣

For more information about the Meskwaki Nation, visit www.meskwaki.org. For more information about the Meskwaki Settlement School, visit www.msswarriors.org.