A New Year Brings New Opportunities
by Vincent Armenta

“More than 20 years ago, many of us entered the tribal gaming world, hoping to create jobs for tribal members and the community. We have used gaming as a springboard and have exercised our entrepreneurial muscle to delve further into entertainment and hospitality and invest in other businesses in our communities.”

I am optimistic about the year of 2016 and what it may bring for Native American tribes throughout the U.S. For the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, we are looking forward to a productive and successful year – thanks to a monumental development that took place in 2015 and a project that will see its completion in 2016.

The development that transpired last year was a historic and proud moment in our tribe’s history. On August 26, 2015, California Governor Jerry Brown signed the new tribal-state gaming compact between the State of California and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians. A week later, the California State Legislature ratified the compact. The California Senate, which consists of 40 state senators, voted 39-0 in favor of the tribe’s compact. The California Assembly, comprised of 80 members, voted 79-0 for the compact. As I sat in the public galleries of both the California Senate and Assembly, surrounded by members of our tribe’s Business Committee, I watched our Legislature in action and felt a sense of tremendous pride.

AB 1540, the Santa Ynez Chumash tribal gaming compact ratification bill, was introduced to the Assembly by Assemblymember Adam Gray (D-Merced) and to the Senate by Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson (D-Santa Barbara). It received overwhelming bipartisan support and both Assemblymember Gray and Senator Jackson told their fellow legislators that our compact was mutually beneficial and was also good for the local community.

Assemblymember William P. Brough (R-Dana Point) praised the tribe and the compact: “I had the opportunity last month to visit their reservation and they’re doing some great work out there not only on the reservation but in the community, as well. This compact was a thoughtful and meaningful negotiation that will serve the tribe and state for years to come.”

Prior to the Legislature floor vote on the compact, informational hearings were held for both the Senate and the Assembly. During the public comment period of the informational hearings, support of our compact came from a number of other California tribes, as well as from members of the union.

The first gaming compact our tribe negotiated with the State of California was in 1999. This new compact, which expires in 2040, will allow our tribe to continue building our economic foundation for future generations of our tribe. Re-negotiating our compact with the state was tribal sovereignty in action, demonstrating how productive a government-to-government relationship can be truly be.

Another exciting development is our casino expansion project that would vastly improve our facility. We put together a high caliber team and awarded contracts to Tutor Perini Building Corp., Delawie and Summit Project Management to complete our project.

The scope of the work for the project includes construction of a hotel tower that will add more than 200 additional rooms and include a 20,000 sq. ft. pool deck, a parking garage, a world-class spa, expansion of the existing gaming floor and additional food and beverage venues, as well as remodeled existing restaurants. When all is said and done, we will have a property that will allow us to deliver a higher level of service, quality and luxury to our loyal guests.

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As we move into the year of 2016, we can look forward to seeing Native American tribes all across the U.S. continuing to march confidently down the road to economic self-sufficiency.

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Vincent Armenta is the Tribal Chairman of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, located in Santa Ynez, CA. He can be reached by calling (805) 688-7997 or email info@santaynezchumash.org.