



LEADERSHIP

Tribal Gaming Protection Network: 3rd Annual Women in Tribal Gaming Symposium

by David Vialpando

On May 8-9, the Tribal Game Protection Network (TGPN) held the 3rd Annual Women in Tribal Gaming Symposium at Morongo Resort and Casino in Cabazon, CA. Symposium Chairwoman Frances Alvarez, former Licensing Manager for the San Pasqual Gaming Commission and Director of Professional Services for Merydyan Technologies – with the support of TGPN Chairman Andrew Hofstetter; the TGPN Board of Directors; essential corporate sponsors; workshop presenters; artisans; and many volunteers – organized a productive and memorable symposium for an amazing group of tribal gaming professionals and tribal government officials from across the country. While most of the symposium attendees were women, a few of their male counterparts also attended.

The Morongo Resort and Casino, along with the Morongo Gaming Agency led by Executive Director Oscar Schuyler, hosted the symposium and went all out with their hospitality, as they have every year the symposium has been held. Morongo represents the epitome of skill, hospitality, and professionalism in the gaming industry.



Cheryl Stevens (Oneida of WI), Tribal Grants Manager for the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin; and Frances Alvarez (San Pasqual), Director of Professional Services for Merydyan Technologies.

that we have come a long way in expanding the diversity within the gaming profession to reflect the amazing talent, knowledge, skill, and dedication found in all quarters of society, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or lifestyle choice. We have come to realize that diversity equals variety of perspectives, and variety of perspectives leads to innovation, with innovation leading to forward progress, which is vital to the continued success of any profession, and indeed society itself.

We still have a long way to go. We live in a world filled with anger, where polarized beliefs and intransigence can be found in nearly all segments of society, from politics to religion, sports to education, boardroom to courtroom. In 2019, 127 women were elected to represent their constituents in the U.S. Congress, including the first Native American women elected to Congress, New Mexico Representative Deb Haaland (Pueblo of Laguna) and Kansas Representative Sharice Davids (Ho Chunk Nation), but that number of women only represents 25% of the U.S. Senate and 23.4% of the U.S. House of Representatives. According to *Fortune.com*, as of May 2018, only 24 women served as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, less than 5% of the total list. Women have still not achieved guaranteed pay equity with their male counterparts in the workplace, and incidents of sexism, harassment, and discrimination remain uncomfortable realities in our largely male-dominated society. Progress has been made, but there is a long way to go.

Those of us in the gaming profession would be wise to review the findings in the 2017 publication, *Gaming Gender Equality Index*, commissioned by the Women of Diversity Productions, Inc.



Janice Stevens DesRosiers (San Carlos Apache), Owner/Broker of American Indian Insurance Services; and Liza Vera, LA Sheriff's Department.

The tone of the symposium was set early by the impassioned presentation delivered by Cheryl Stevens, Tribal Grants Manager for the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. The presentations and symposium activities that followed for the next two days emphasized support, mentorship, empowerment, perseverance, and professional skill development – themes seldom encountered at other training conferences and forums. The Mentors' Luncheon, networking opportunities, and professional skill development workshops reminded all of us



Linda Sacks (Cherokee Nation of OK), Board Member and Director of Public Affairs for Native America Action; and LaRenda Morgan (Cheyenne Arapaho), Governmental Affairs Officer for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, and Board Member of Native America Action.

This study examined 21 large U.S. gaming corporations and their treatment of women in the workplace. A grading index was developed based on the following categories: gender composition and compensation, non-discrimination policies, internal support policies, and community gender equality commitment. The maximum score possible was 100 points. Actual scores ranged from 25-62, with the mean among the 21 corporations being 43.89 points. Not one of the corporations examined had a female CEO, chairwoman, or president, and only three corporations had one-third or more of executive board seats held by women. The study concluded that, “there was no real commitment to gender equality in more than one third of the corporations. We considered this to be “all talk, no action.” The companies studied were found to be woefully lacking in policies and provisions directly affecting female employees, such as wage parity, child care, return to work provisions, and paid maternity benefits. Only 57% of corporations admitted to having gender specific nondiscrimination policies in effect. We still have a long way to go.

We must recognize that implicit bias and stereotyping are strong barriers to promoting women to leadership positions. The absence of women in corporate leadership positions not only results in reduced productivity, but also encourages perceived inferiority of women in the workplace. Training, mentoring, and sponsorship programs for women are vital for developing future leaders. This was a theme found throughout the TGPN Women in Tribal Gaming Symposium. The talent, passion, and commitment we bring to our profession has nothing to do with our ascribed characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, skin tone, hair color, or any other characteristic. We are all equal in terms of potential and

capability and deserve every opportunity to achieve success.

Recent studies show that Native American women are far more likely to receive associate’s degrees, bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees and doctoral degrees than their male counterparts. Women in our profession are ready, willing, and able to assume leadership positions within our casinos and regulatory agencies. The TGPN Women in Tribal Gaming Symposium aptly demonstrated that the passion, commitment, and capability for excellence runs deep among our female colleagues. Our commitment to treat all of our co-workers with respect, dignity, appreciation and support will result in prosperity and progress in reaching our goal of tribal economic development and self-sufficiency. ♣

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