



## Up Close with Bill Anoatubby, Governor of the Chickasaw Nation

*Bill Anoatubby was the recipient of the Wendell Chino Humanitarian Award at this year's NIGA conference. Under Anoatubby's direction since 1987, the Chickasaw Nation has become one of the most successful tribes in Indian Country, operating a number of popular gaming destinations, such as Riverwind Casino, as well as non-gaming businesses. Governor Anoatubby recently spoke with Indian Gaming magazine to discuss his tribe's success and the principles of leadership that made it possible.*

### **What was your vision for the Chickasaw Nation when you first took office as governor?**

Our vision at that time is very much the same as it is today – to be a nation of successful and united people with a strong cultural identity. We have always believed that the best way to make that vision a reality is to empower individuals with opportunities for success. Our goal is to be sure every Chickasaw has the tools to achieve success. Our mission is to enhance the overall quality of life of the Chickasaw people. We work to provide access to health care, housing, education, career opportunities, family services and senior services for our citizens.

### **What were the major obstacles facing the tribe in 1987 and how were they overcome?**

In 1987, more than 90 percent of our funding for programs and services came from the federal government. We were seeking to enhance the overall quality of life of Chickasaw people by providing health care, housing, education and other services. As we moved forward toward that goal, we realized that we would need to supplement the funding we received from the federal government. Because of that, we began to focus more of our efforts on economic development. In order to provide opportunities for success, we needed to be able to provide an adequate level of funding for programs and services.

We also felt it was necessary to be able to provide opportunities for Chickasaw people to fully participate in the success of our tribe. As our economic development efforts have become increasingly successful, we have been able to provide opportunities for thousands of Chickasaws to work for the Chickasaw Nation, in our businesses and in our tribal government.

Today, we have established a strong economic foundation, which enables us to provide educational and career opportunities. We provide education and career opportunities, which have enabled Chickasaw people to achieve greater personal success. That success translates into a stronger foundation for future generations. Our young people are able to look to their parents and other Chickasaw people as role models who have achieved great things in life. This encourages the younger generations to believe that they too can achieve great things. That provides a great deal of motivation for young people to apply themselves – to work toward their dreams and

to live up to the incredible potential they possess.

We have also established a stable and effective government, which responds to the will of the Chickasaw people. It is extremely important that we work together as a community to accomplish those things that individuals are not able to achieve alone.

### **What have been the most significant milestones for the Chickasaw Nation over the past twenty years?**

We have made considerable progress in health care initiatives. We have constructed clinics throughout the Chickasaw Nation, which provides Native Americans much better access to health care. We have also developed a comprehensive diabetes care center, which provides a full range of services.

We have also opened several wellness centers throughout the Chickasaw Nation as part of our comprehensive approach to preventive health care. We are also very close to completing a new Chickasaw medical center. We are excited about the significant new opportunities the new hospital will offer our citizens, patients and community. This new facility is designed to empower our staff to function much more efficiently and effectively. This will enable us to offer a higher level of service and improve the overall quality of health care.

The cultural center, which will open later this year has been a vision of the Chickasaw people for more than 20 years. Chickasaws of all ages and from all walks of life contributed to the development of the center and the programming that will be available. It is beautiful and an opportunity for us to tell the remarkable history of Chickasaw people.

We have also made a significant investment in our young people. We are providing the tools and guidance our young people need to lead successful lives and become the leaders of tomorrow. Our camps and academies enable students to make that vital connection between education and a career. Camps and academies such as the Chickasaw Nation Aviation and Space Academy, Chickasaw Summer Arts Academy and others provide the opportunity for young people to learn directly from accomplished professionals.

Our leadership initiatives enable young people to see beyond their own careers and discover that the most notable achievements involve enhancing the lives of others. Our strength lies

in the yearning of our children for a better tomorrow, their thirst for knowledge and their willing embrace of all that is Chickasaw. More than \$11 million in education assistance was provided to students in FY 2009. More than 2,000 students received grants and scholarships to assist in the pursuit of higher education.

We have also developed a number of initiatives designed to enhance the lives of our elders. These initiatives go beyond nutrition, health and housing. Our senior centers provide an environment that enhances the social lives of our seniors. They develop friendships, engage in activities and support one another in a way that greatly enriches their lives.

**How has the Chickasaw Nation and its gaming enterprises maintained such a high level of success, especially given the economic adversity over the past few years?**

We feel blessed that the economic downturn has not had as much of an impact in this region of the U.S. as it has in other regions. Our business operations, including some of the more familiar businesses such as WinStar and Riverwind, our two largest casinos, continue to be very successful. We expect them to continue to do well. We are continuously searching for opportunities to develop new businesses and expand existing businesses. We are working diligently and carefully to develop a wide range of businesses. We recently opened hotels at WinStar and Riverwind.

Our success with gaming led us to establish Global Gaming Solutions, which provides gaming consultation. Global Gaming Solutions also provides the mechanism to pursue gaming opportunities outside our jurisdictional boundaries. Our recent purchase of Remington Park in Oklahoma City and Lone Star Park in Texas are two examples of those types of opportunities.

Our casinos, racetracks and hotels provide the basis for our focus on hospitality and tourism. We believe tourism will become increasingly important to the economy of the Chickasaw Nation and the state of Oklahoma. We expect the Chickasaw Cultural Center and the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma City to draw visitors from across the U.S. as well as visitors from Europe and Asia.

We have invested in a bank, Chickasaw Nation Industries, a chocolate company, long-term acute care hospitals, hotels, radio stations, and a number of other businesses. Chickasaw Nation Industries is very profitable and continues to grow. Bank2, which is wholly owned by the Chickasaw Nation, has grown steadily since it was first opened about eight years ago. In contrast to many of the problems we are seeing in the global economy, Bank2 continues its record of being a well-capitalized and profitable institution.

**How would you characterize the central principles of your leadership?**

It is important to be a servant leader. Successful leaders remember that they work for the people. Leaders must not put themselves above the people, but recognize they are servants of

the people. Our leadership team always considers how decisions will affect the Chickasaw people. In order to understand how decisions will affect the people, it is important to maintain close contact with the people. We encourage feedback and suggestions from our citizens. Many of the most successful initiatives we have implemented have been a result of citizen suggestions.

**What advice can you offer to tribes in terms of facing adversity and overcoming social and political obstacles?**

It is very important for tribes to share knowledge with one another, because we all encounter similar challenges and opportunities. It is important that we learn to work together and learn from one another. An important reason for the success we enjoy is what we have been able to learn from other tribes and organizations. Chickasaw people have a long history of not only respecting other cultures, but learning what those cultures have to teach. To some degree, success in life involves a balance of applying the lessons learned through your own culture, history and experience, while still remaining open to new possibilities. ♣

*For more information about the Chickasaw Nation, visit [www.chickasaw.net](http://www.chickasaw.net).*



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