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FORT MCDOWELL YAVAPAI NATION CELEBRATES 31ST ANNUAL SOVEREIGNTY DAY

Four-mile commemorative walk symbolizes the 1992 protest march from Fort McDowell Casino to the Arizona State Capitol, a critical part of the Tribe's non-violent standoff that paved the way for Indian Gaming in Arizona

FORT MCDOWELL , Ariz. – May 8, 2023 – On May 12, the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation will hold its 31st annual Sovereignty Day Celebration, a milestone anniversary commemorating one of the most significant days in Fort McDowell's history.

Following a continental breakfast and posting of the colors at the Fort McDowell Old Casino Bingo Hall Memorial Statue, veterans will lead a four-mile commemorative march starting at approximately 7:15 am from the Fort McDowell Old Casino Bingo Hall parking lot to the Fort McDowell Parks & Recreation Center. This historically significant highlight of the morning-long event will emulate the 1992 protest march from Fort McDowell Casino to the Arizona State Capitol, with hay wagon rides provided by Fort McDowell Adventures for Elders, young children and others unable to complete the four-mile trek. The walk will be followed by an informative program, luncheon and entertainment at the Recreation Center Ramada.

Three decades ago, 25 to 50 federal agents and U.S. marshals raided the Fort McDowell Gaming Center. Before they could leave with the 349 slot machines they had confiscated, more than 100 Tribal members, community members, casino employees and casino guests blockaded the only road out. The subsequent three-week non-violent standoff culminated in the state signing compacts with Arizona tribes – paving the way for Indian Gaming throughout the state.

“Every year at this time we honor our parents, grandparents, friends and other tribal members who so bravely – and peacefully – deterred the efforts of government officials to attack our Tribal Sovereignty and self-determination,” said Bernadine Burnette, president of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation. “Their passion, commitment, and firm belief in preserving what rightfully belonged to us has sculpted not only our Tribal Council and members but the entire landscape of Arizona gaming. This is a very proud day for the Yavapai people, and we appreciate the commitment and hard work of everyone involved who make this annual event so meaningful and memorable.”

Since that fateful event in 1992, the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation has continued to prosper, give back to the community, and celebrate their rich heritage. In October 2020, this resilient, progressive and inclusive spirit was demonstrated with the opening of the We-Ko-Pa Casino Resort, a state-of-the-art dining and entertainment facility that set a new bar for gaming in the Valley. Since then, the AAA Four Diamond property has added a WKP Sportsbook powered by Betfred, new restaurants, and other offerings designed to attract both new and returning guests.

About the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation

The Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation is an 889-member Native American tribe that calls Central Arizona's upper Sonoran Desert home. Located to the northeast of Phoenix within Maricopa County, Arizona, the 40-square mile reservation is a small part of the ancestral territory of the once nomadic Yavapai people, who hunted and gathered food in a vast area of Arizona's desert lowlands and mountainous Mogollon Rim country.

The tribe operates a variety of successful enterprises including the We-Ko-Pa Casino Resort, We-Ko-Pa Golf Club, Fort McDowell Adventures, Eagle View RV Resort, Baja Gas, Yavapai Materials and the Tribal Farm.

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