

Economic Development

How CIEDA got its start



Looking back on the history of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, many will appreciate what a long, hard road the Tribe has traveled to become who they are today.

Elders soon began to plan for future generations and paved a path for today's young people to advance and not rely on others to provide a way of living.

Thus, in the mid-1980s, Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority (CIEDA) was born. **CIEDA's purpose is to secure our Tribe's future beyond gaming by optimizing returns on funds and natural resources entrusted to us by the Council. CIEDA empowers talented leaders to focus their energy and build profitable organizations by adding value with our capital and management expertise to high-potential business ventures. This creates opportunities for our Tribe and generates wealth, leaving a lasting legacy.**

This is the first part of a series on the history of CIEDA and why the Tribe branched out into economic development.

The boom of economic development

Economies ebb and flow, and generations have a responsibility to leave legacies for their offspring. The Poarch Band of Creek Indians have been doing this for centuries.

But it wasn't until the '80s that a few tribal leaders began to consider new ways to live and become successful. There began the movement into diversification for our Tribe.

From 1984 to 1988, leaders studied economic development. When the Tribe regained

federal recognition, it began to look at ways to further prosper as a people and give back to its neighbors in Alabama and the country as a whole. Other Indian organizations also started concentrating on economic development.

Tribal Member Mal McGhee was on the board of directors for Tribal Government when investments began to take root. When CIEDA was formed, McGhee was on the board of directors there, too.

"Because I had a background in both government and economic development, I was put on both boards," McGhee said. "The businesses under CIEDA were the Best Western (now Muskogee Inn), Muskogee Metalworks (now Muskogee Technology), Creek Family Restaurant, Creek Bingo Palace and a couple others."

Going beyond gaming

Many Indian tribes across the country have long operated gaming facilities on tribal lands as a source of income. Through trial and error, some have succeeded, and others have not.

Poarch Creek gaming began with Creek Bingo Palace. Although this was highly profitable, leaders considered its future sustainability and began to explore other business areas. With that came a learning curve.

"Gaming blossomed around Indian country and those of us on the national scene realized not only the challenge to sustain that industry, but **how to use that resource to try to create a continuity of income for the Tribe,**" current Tribal Council Treasurer Eddie Tullis

said. "Certain people early on realized the value of keeping government and economic development separate but balanced."

McGhee, Tullis and other leaders attended an economic conference at Harvard University, where they were taught to follow a structure to

have the businesses be separated from government completely.

"Indian tribes are unique in that we are a sovereign government," Tullis said. "Here at Poarch Creek, we understood that as a Tribe, we couldn't successfully run a government and do economic

development in tandem. So we created CIEDA as our economic development branch. We then appointed tribal leaders who understood economics to diversify our portfolio. By separating government from economic development, we got ahead of the curve and began to learn how to sustain and provide service to our people.

"Gaming gave us a financial entity that was totally outside the realm of economics," he said. With gaming, the Tribe really has no competition in the market. But with each enterprise, competitors are everywhere. Looking at all economic factors is important when considering certain industries. Price gaps, fluctuating profits and costs all decide how well an industry does at any given time.

"We knew we didn't want to rely on the luxury of gaming forever, so we chose our ventures wisely and it's paid off."

Look for part two in this series next month.

CIEDA focuses on building profitable businesses to create opportunities for Tribal members.
