



The Bingo Renaissance: Spotlight on Tulalip Bingo

by Eric Casey

Established by the Point Elliot Treaty on January 22nd, 1855, and enlarged in 1873 under executive order, by then president Ulysses S. Grant, the Tulalip reservation today comprises some 22,000 acres in the mid-Puget Sound area of Washington state near the city of Marysville. The Tulalip reservation created a permanent home for the peoples of more than 22 allied tribes living in the area, including the Salish, Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Skagit, Suiattle, Samish, and Stillaguamish.

In June of 1983, the Tulalip tribes became the first in the state of Washington to open an Indian bingo hall. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was passed 5 years later, and the Tulalip tribes became the first in the state to negotiate a compact with state government, opening their first casino in 1992, with 23 tables offering blackjack, craps, roulette, and poker.

Tulalip Bingo today has its own 20,000 square foot facility in Tulalip, about a mile from the new Tulalip Casino. The bingo hall seats 850 people and is open every day offering 23 sessions of bingo a week. The hall provides customers with quality food and beverage service at its deli, and additional gaming excitement with a wide variety of Class II slots and high-stakes pulltabs.

What keeps Tulalip Bingo going strong into its 23rd year? I spoke with Tammy Taylor, Bingo Manager, about the history and future of Tulalip Bingo, and about her recipe for success.

Tammy has worked at Tulalip Bingo for 21 of its years, starting out as a deli cashier in the bingo hall. She recalls that the bingo hall was one of the early commercial enterprises on the Tulalip reservation, and that she learned right at the outset that the bingo had a mission: to create jobs and revenue that would benefit Tulalip and help build tribal infrastructure. Tammy was blessed with the mentorship of Wayne Williams, who in 1985 stepped down from a five-year tenure with the Tulalip board of directors to take over management of the bingo hall. Wayne's lessons in management technique and business analysis were always based on a foundation of true caring – caring for the youth, the tribe, the community, and the customers. This legacy guides Tammy today.

Tulalip Bingo opened its doors with \$1,000 prizes on some bingo games – very high-stakes at the time, considering the average prize payouts in charitable bingo halls were only \$100 per game. In those early days at Tulalip, bingo was played with blue, green, and grey shuttercards representing three levels of buy-in and pay-out. A blue single pay card cost 50 cents, and paid \$250; a green double pay card cost \$1 paying \$500, and a grey triple pay card for \$1.50 would pay \$750. Tammy remembers that the best players could play 24 shutter cards!

In 1984, on the bingo hall's 1st anniversary, a very special prize giveaway got a lot of attention: a brand new Corvette! This monster event led to more car-giveaways each year, creating huge bingo excitement. Even today, Tulalip continues to host event-bingos throughout the year, sometimes giving away cars, sometime huge cash prizes.

Over the years, the Tulalip Bingo hall evolved into Tulalip Casino Bingo, adding table games, poker, and keno to its list of gaming entrees, and then came the early slot-like IVLT's (Indian Video Lottery Terminals). When these started rolling in, the space occupied by bingo was suddenly in demand to hold these hot new machines and in May of 1999, the bingo management was suddenly given 2 weeks notice that bingo was closing.

For manager Tammy Taylor and her supervisors, Barry Hatch and Shelley Brown, this was a time to find opportunity in adversity. They rallied the staff, and with two weeks to make it happen, found a location in an empty Hewlett-Packard warehouse across from the casino. The board organized the lease and the bingo team scrubbed the old warehouse into a bingo hall, opening up as 'Tulalip Bingo at HP.' Jobs, customers, and the business enterprise of bingo were secure again!

As Goethe said, "the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too." Tulalip Bingo at HP was successful, and the tribal commitment to keep bingo grew. On February 28, 2000, with a great deal of fanfare, Tulalip Bingo at HP closed and a new hall on tribal land was opened in the current location, serving customers 7 days per week – Tulalip Bingo was back!

Today, Tulalip Bingo still offers its bingo players a range of choices for buy-ins and various levels of pay-out, available on paper bingo or on electronic bingo handsets. Promotions and special events are ongoing, with the focus on creating a fun and exciting bingo environment while maintaining a major focus on customer service and a 'family atmosphere.'

This family atmosphere is at the center of Tulalip Bingo's spirit... Tammy explained this with a simple but powerful vision. "The bingo hall is really an extension of tribal culture in that we welcome our customers into our longhouse and consider each of them our friends. We take care of the longhouse,' she told me, 'and we always move forward.'"



Tulalip Casino's Bingo Manager
Tammy Taylor

Tammy is as committed to the success of Tulalip Bingo today as she was 21 years ago, and as she was on that day in 1999 when told that bingo would close. “And,” she said, “we’re willing to create and experiment and try new things here – we’re always looking for the next level of reinvention.”

I asked where she got her determination, and she smiled. Certainly from her great-grandparents, she said. Her great-grandma Sarah was enterprising – she used to knit socks and sell them to a young entrepreneur in Seattle named Eddie Bauer. And she told me the story of her great-grandfather, Robert Sheldon, who took a stand against the Indian boarding school that native children were once forced to attend. The mission of the boarding schools was to ‘assimilate’ native children, and the kids were compelled to speak only English and forbidden their spiritual practices and traditional customs. The boarding schools persisted into the 1920’s. “My grandfather, Tammy told me, “had pulled his kids out of the boarding school, and was even jailed in Tulalip for a time for refusing to comply with orders to send them back.” Ultimately, he was able to purchase a house in Marysville which allowed him to enroll his kids in the school district, opening the door for further integration.

While passionate about bingo, Tammy is even more passionate about the role bingo has played and will continue to play in the overall development of tribal economy. Bingo currently provides some 80 jobs in the community, and contributes to the Tulalip objective of improving the lives of the people through funding family services, and helping to build a strong and sustainable tribal economy that will serve the generations to come. This awareness permeates the business side of bingo, and Tammy points out that one of her greatest joys is organizing a much anticipated event: an annual bingo game honoring tribal members, where friends and families come together at the hall to reflect on and celebrate their accomplishments as a tribe.

The Tulalip Tribes are all about moving forward. Today Tulalip operates diverse business enterprises, including the Tulalip Amphitheater and the magnificent Tulalip Casino with

2,000 slots, a full spectrum of table games, and four fantastic eateries.

And there is the vibrant Quil Ceda Casino, the old ‘Q’ building which is now decked out in an eclectic rock and roll ambience and very popular with the younger crowd of gamers looking for a bit of casino and a bit of nightclub rolled into one.

The new Quil Ceda Business Park is a fast growing shopping and commercial center right off of Interstate 5, near the Consolidated Borough of Quil Ceda Village where the administrative and municipal hub for Tulalip is centralized.

As Tammy explained, taking care of the longhouse is what it’s all about. And the Tulalip Tribes open their longhouse to the local community in powerful ways with a very aggressive program of charitable donations. Tulalip operates three funds, the community impact fund, a Tulalip community impact fund, and a general charitable fund. In the 12-month period ending

June 30th, 2005, the Tulalip Tribes contributed over 1.8 million dollars to charitable beneficiaries of these funds.

Back at the bingo hall Tammy and her team are busy working on future promotions, new ideas, and as Tammy describes it, “taking bingo to the next level.” Twenty-three years ago, Tulalip Bingo was the first tribal bingo in the state of Washington, starting with shuttercards. With steady focus on moving forward, embracing change, creating excitement, and maintaining the Tulalip family atmosphere, there is no doubt that Tulalip Bingo will continue to blaze trails long into the future of Class II gaming! ♣

For more information about bingo at Tulalip Casino, visit www.tulalipcasino.com

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Tulalip Bingo’s original building (above) and today (below).

