

Viejas Celebrates 20 Years of History and Service



Viejas Casino in Alpine, CA

As the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians celebrates the 20th anniversary of Viejas Casino in September it will be a month-long celebration of the past two decades, kicked off with an announcement that demonstrates the enterprise's future success and strong forward momentum. Events that are planned throughout September will invite guests, team members dignitaries, and tribal members to share memories of the past and look forward to continued success in the future.

Originally named Viejas Valley Casino when it opened in September, 1991, it housed table games, including blackjack, poker and Pai Gow, and off-track-betting. It also had one modest snack bar, which did not even offer seating. But that was adequate for the times and it was the spark that helped launch Viejas Casino into the gaming powerhouse that it has since become – one of the most successful Indian casinos in all of California.

The 255,000 sq. ft. Viejas Casino now boasts 2,000 slots, more than 50 table games, a newly renovated poker room, vibrant bingo pavilion and off-track betting. It also has five restaurants, including the award winning Grove Steakhouse and Harvest Buffet, and two popular entertainment venues, the V Lounge and DreamCatcher, one of Southern California's premier intimate concert venues, which seats approximately 500 without a bad seat in the house.

Viejas is one of the 12 remaining Bands of Kumeyaay Indians, who have inhabited Southern California and northern Mexico for more than 10,000 years. Like their ancestors before them who were great hunters, craftsmen and early environmental keepers of Mother Earth, the Viejas Band has continued to be a respectful and motivating force for its people and the community at large. The Band's ancestors were the first to greet explorer Juan Cabrillo when his sailing expedition landed at Point Loma, on the northern edge of what is now the City of San Diego, in 1542. The Kumeyaay people

helped Cabrillo and his crew by sharing their knowledge of the land and its resources that were critical to their survival. That history of hospitality has carried forward. Today, Viejas Casino and Viejas Outlets welcome thousands of visitors every day of the year, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The success of Viejas Casino has created an economic engine that has helped drive the Viejas Tribal Community out of a multi-generational cycle of poverty and oppression into a world of opportunities, including economic self-sufficiency and self-governance. Tribal government gaming revenues have helped Viejas provide its people with health care services, public works infrastructure, education, housing and more. Gaming revenues have also allowed Viejas to extend its history of charity and hospitality in a way that will have a lasting impact off the reservation as well – for generations to come. Where Viejas was once one of the largest recipients of aid from the San Diego food bank scarcely two decades ago, the Band is now one of the largest providers of charitable giving in San Diego County. Over the past 20 years, Viejas' financial contributions to support community schools, charities, arts programs, scholarships and outreach averages more than \$2 million a year.

Aside from charitable contributions, the economic impact of Viejas Casino and Viejas Outlets, and other businesses operated under the Viejas Enterprises umbrella, has been enormously positive, not only for the thousands of team members directly employed there, but also for the thousands of vendors who provide products and services to Viejas and, of course, for the State of California, which collects millions of dollars in fees each year as negotiated in gaming compacts with the Band in 1999 and amended in 2004. Over the past 20 years, Viejas has employed more than 12,000 people, with a total payroll of nearly \$1 billion; worked with approximately 8,500 vendors; and paid more than \$176 million in compact fees.

“It’s hard to believe it’s been 20 years,” said Viejas Tribal Chairman Anthony Pico. “We’ve accomplished so much for the tribal community in those 20 years, but also for the entire region, on and off the reservation. The success of Viejas Casino has as much to do with tribal vision and leadership as it does with the support, hard work and dedication of our beloved team members and Southern California residents who have supported Viejas Casino and the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians every step of the way. It’s been especially gratifying for me to see team members who have been with us for a long time move up in their careers at Viejas and be able to provide for their families and thrive in their communities.”

The award-winning 265,000 sq. ft. Viejas Outlets was built in 1998 to compliment the Viejas Casino, and immediately set itself apart from virtually every other retail center in Southern California. The Band could have chosen to erect a more typical concrete big-box style retail outlet, but instead they chose to construct a stunning piece of outdoor architecture that creates an immediate impression on first-time visitors, and a lasting impression on those who have watched it grow beyond its original concept.

Viejas Outlets has evolved from a strict retail concept, into a family-friendly shopping and entertainment destination, well-equipped for residents of nearby Alpine and other communities known as East San Diego County. These new offerings include restaurants, a bowling center, arcade and miniature golf. A seasonal outdoor ice rink, the largest outdoor ice rink in Southern California, draws tens of thousands of skaters each year. In addition, other special, community-oriented activities and events are held at Viejas Outlets, including free outdoor concerts, a farmer’s market, and an annual tree lighting ceremony featuring the largest holiday tree in San Diego County. A draw for many tour bus companies, Viejas Outlets is also home to the California Welcome Center. The first to be established on Native American lands, the Welcome Center serves as a gateway to the more than 8.9 million people who annually travel on Interstate 8 into San Diego County. According to the California Travel & Tourism Commission, traffic to the center is expected to be approximately 60,000 guests annually.

These creative business ideas have brought employment to East San Diego County in huge numbers and make a large economic impact with the thousands of local vendors and service providers who work with Viejas.

Serving the community well is always a focus for Viejas Enterprises and this is especially important in the casino and businesses where guests come in contact with employees every day. Chloe Rogers, a Viejas Casino host since 1994, knows the importance of creating a positive atmosphere for guests. “It’s been a joy to know our guests, their husbands or wives. We had some great experiences with our guests,” she said. “We are all part of a family here, a big, extended family.”

The 20th Anniversary celebrations planned for September



Viejas Outlets “Show Court” with interactive fountains

got a kick-start on August 31st, when tribal and casino leaders announced plans for construction of a new, 150-room hotel, which will be located next to Viejas Casino. Meanwhile, exciting anniversary plans are underway, with a special focus on September 17. That’s when Viejas tribal representatives perform a tribal blessing and ceremonial bird songs, followed by cake cutting, receptions and special drawings in the casino. The drawings culminate with one lucky guest driving away with a new 2012 Corvette. Corvettes have long been one of the “signature” prizes at Viejas Casino over the past two decades, so it’s more than just another promotion; it’s a way to look to the past with team members, casino guests and tribal members, with an eye toward future success.

20th Anniversary plans also include historic photos, videos and mementos that will be on display throughout the casino all month. They will be physical reminders that Viejas Casino’s success as a business ultimately comes back its primary asset – strong relationships with diverse people determined to succeed together.

“The history of Viejas Casino is more than just a history of how a casino enterprise struggled to achieve incredible success,” said Viejas Casino General Manager Chris Kelley. “That alone is, of course, a tremendous story. But in the case of Viejas Casino, our history is one of personal and political struggles – a history of a people who overcame enormous adversity, found their opportunity for economic and social freedom, and worked with the entire community to achieve a lifeline for themselves and future generations. That’s the history that we want to re-create for this anniversary and beyond. It’s an opportunity to re-establish a sense of community with our guests, our neighbors, tribal members and team members.” ♣

For more information about Viejas Casino, please visit www.viejas.com.