

*CABAZON, THE INDIAN GAMING REGULATORY
ACT, AND THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES
OF AMERICAN INDIAN GOVERNMENTAL GAMING
A CASE STUDY*

INDIAN GAMING AND
COMMUNITY BUILDING:
A HISTORY OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL
RELATIONS OF THE MOHEGAN TRIBE OF
CONNECTICUT

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MALCOLM WIENER CENTER FOR SOCIAL POLICY
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT - HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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We, Uncass and Owoneco Sachems of the Mohegan Indians having had a long friendship with the English, do hereby declare our fidelity to them for the future, and do engage and firmly binde ourselves and promise and engage for and in the behalfe of the Mohegans under our Command that we will not plot...any mischiefe against the English, and that ourselves and those under our Government shall behave themselves...friendly laudable and ... towards the English, not suffering any abuse to be offered to them in word or deeds, and that if we shall know of any conspiracye or complotments against them, by any the Indians of this Country, we will give speedy and timely notice to the authority of the Colony of Connecticut, and that we will be ready upon all occasions to defend the interest, estates and persons of the English when by them called there unto, to the utmost of our power...¹

The Mohegan Tribe of Uncasville, Connecticut, thrives today because of its highly profitable Mohegan Sun Casino Resort. Upon achieving federal recognition as an American Indian tribe through the Bureau of Acknowledgement and Research of the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1994, the tribe negotiated a tribal-state gaming compact with the State of Connecticut, purchased property with trust funds, and began to work with the neighboring towns on future economic development initiatives. In 1996, the Mohegan Tribe opened its Earth Casino, which had immediate success. In 2002, the Sky Casino was completed; the Mohegans since have welcomed thousands of visitors to the facility on a daily basis. The Mohegans' achievements are largely attributable to a unique set of historical circumstances, optimal geographic location, and the ability of the Mohegan Council, tribal representatives, and citizens to establish and nurture mutually beneficial relationships with their non-American Indian neighbors. This tradition of diplomacy is

¹ Article of Mutual Friendship and Defense between the Mohegan Indians and the English, May 24, 1678, bearing the marks of Uncass and Owoneco as well as other Indian witnesses at Hartford, CT.

rooted in historical precedents that date back to the Mohegan's first contacts with non-Indians.

HISTORY MATTERS

The origins of the Mohegan Tribe can be traced to events preceding the Pequot War of 1636-37. The war marked a turning point in Indian-colonial relations, as it produced the near-annihilation of the powerful Pequots by the English and their newly-established Indian allies. The political climate preceding the war was tense, with much inter- and intra-tribal dissension. Epidemics exacted a devastating toll on the region's indigenous peoples, and along with growing frictions created by the fur trade, placed inordinate stress on the social and political relations between those groups.

Escalating rivalries fomented increasing disputes between indigenous groups, prompting the Pequots in particular to break apart into two groups, the Mohegan and the Pequots. The Mohegan group followed the sachem Uncas, while the Pequot organized around the sachem Sassacus. Causing the split was the two sachems' differing views regarding the manner in which the Pequots should conduct business with European trading interests. While Sassacus opted for a path of outright resistance, Uncas looked to preserve his group's relative independence by befriending the English.

The separation between Uncas and Sassacus and the building tensions that followed their split soon escalated to what became known as the "Pequot War, or Massacre." The Mohegans, led by Uncas, the Narragansetts of the Rhode Island area, and some Connecticut River and Nipmuck Indians who were embittered by the Pequots' dominance of the area trade networks, allied with the English against the Pequots. The Pequots had their own allies, including the Western Nehantic and other Nipmuck. In the fall of 1636, the English attacked and burned two Pequot villages on the Thames River. The Pequots responded, invading Fort Saybrook and then Fort Wethersfield. The English, led by Captain John Mason and accompanied by their Native allies—

including Mohegans and Narragansetts—then assaulted Mystic Fort on May 26, 1637, massacring over four hundred Pequots.

The Pequot War officially ended with the signing of a treaty in 1638. The war considerably altered the social and political dynamics in the area. It clearly installed the English as the region's dominant military force, subjugating the once-powerful Pequots. In addition, it enabled the Mohegans to claim former Pequot territory as their own.

Intertribal conflicts continued after the Pequot War. The Mohegans fought against the Narragansetts in the Battle of the Great Plain and the Siege of Fort Shantok in what is now the Norwich area. English colonists aided the Mohegans in 1645 when the Narragansetts—seeking to avenge the murder of the Narragansett sachem Miantonomo at the hands of the Mohegan sachem Wawequa, Uncas' brother—attempted to starve out the Mohegans at Fort Shantok. Colonists Thomas Tracy, Thomas Miner, and Thomas Leffingwell came to the Mohegans' aid, bringing food to the site.

The Mohegans, led by Uncas, maintained their tribal integrity largely through the alliances Uncas forged with colonists, particularly John Mason, the Englishman who led the Mystic massacre of the Pequots. Because of his alliance-building abilities, Uncas became known as a “friend of the English.”² The Narragansetts and Wampanoags, meanwhile, were not so fortunate. The Mohegans again joined the English colonists to defeat the Narragansetts and Wampanoags in King Phillip's War of 1676.

During the same period, relations between the Mohegans and neighboring colonists grew bitter as the two groups struggled over land. The Mohegans became involved in a series of land claims with the colonists and, eventually, the British government. In 1659, Captain John Mason, acting as an agent of the colony, obtained a deed from Uncas and his brother for all of

² Fawcett, Melissa Jayne. 2000. *Medicine Trail: The Life and Lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, p. 43.

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the Mohegan lands. John Mason surrendered the deed to the Colony of Connecticut in 1660. Later, Mason's descendants questioned the validity of this transaction, arguing that Mason meant to secure the lands for the Mohegans and did not intend to take the lands from them. Consequently, the Mohegans aligned with some of Mason's descendants in a lengthy battle against the colony for substantial tracts of land already widely settled by colonists. The lawsuit dragged on for more than seventy years. Frances Caulkins, a historian of Norwich, noted the support of Norwich residents for the Mohegans' plight:

The citizens of Norwich entered into the Mason controversy with great warmth and zeal, most of them espousing the cause of the Indians, some doubtless from an honest opinion that they had been injured and defrauded, and others from interested motives.³

Under the authority of Queen Anne, the Commissioners of all of the colonies served as representatives in court to argue the case. The aforementioned Thomas Leffingwell of Norwich, a longtime friend of the Mohegans, was one of the Commissioners and exerted considerable influence over the other members of the Commission. In 1705, the court ruled in favor of the Mohegans; however, the English government made little effort to enforce the ruling, and the Mohegans continued to suffer the loss of their lands.

In 1720, the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut appointed a committee to hear the grievances of the Mohegans, deliberate possible reparations to the group, and "endeavor to settle all differences between them and their neighbors."⁴ A subsequent meeting yielded a resolution that was "apparently successful in settling the various claims and reconciling all parties."⁵ In 1721, between 4,000 and 5,000 acres of land was set aside and designated for the use of the Mohegan Indians.

³ Caulkins, Frances Manwaring. 1987. *History of Norwich, Connecticut*. Hartford: Press of Case, Lockwood and Brainard, p. 267.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

EARLY EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH CUSTOMS

The Mohegans' sustained interaction with English settlers resulted in considerable early exposure to English customs, most notably Christianity. Samson Occum (1723-1792), a famous Mohegan leader and Indian advocate, became a Christian missionary who ministered to many of the neighboring tribes. An early student of the New England Christian Indian School in Lebanon, Connecticut, Occum advocated education for Indians and raised funds to further Indian education at the Lebanon school. His efforts were thwarted, however, when non-Natives misappropriated the money that Occum had raised and channeled it to the founding of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Although the Mohegans maintained beneficial relationships with many of their non-Native neighbors, particularly the Mason family, they still suffered the effects of colonial policies and machinations. In 1769, for example, a controversy arose as to which sachem the colony ought to recognize as the leader of the tribe—John Uncas, who enjoyed the support of most Mohegans, or Ben Uncas III, the colony's first choice. To end the controversy, the colony eventually outlawed the Mohegan sachemship. Rather than have this result forced upon them, the Mohegans made their own decision to discontinue the position of sachem. The dispute ultimately divided the nation's settlement into two villages: John's Town and Ben's Town.

In the 19th century, the effects of the Christianizing movement, the growth of the whaling industry, and emigration led to a decline in the number of Mohegans that resided on Mohegan land—despite the fact that the nation escaped explicit removal and relocation to the west. In 1831, the Mohegans established a Christian church and school on their land, which by that time totaled between 2,500 and 3,000 acres. The Mohegans contributed the property for the church, and a non-Native missionary from Norwich named Sarah Lanman Huntington spearheaded the fundraising. Huntington secured monies from the Federal Civilization of the Indian Fund and the Society for

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the Improvement of Indians (the Congregational Church) to fund the church and school projects. Reverend Anson Gleason, a non-Native who previously served as a missionary to the Choctaws and Cherokees, became the church's pastor.

The Mohegan Church, as it was called, welcomed a congregation of both Mohegans and non-Natives, which further facilitated intercultural alliances. The Mohegan Church Ladies' Sewing Society regularly met at the church, and the church grounds and surrounding area served as the site of the Wigwam Festival, which derived from the Mohegans' traditional Green Corn Festival. Anthropologist Frank Speck noted in a 1923 account that "the green in front of the church is still the spiritual center of life at Mohegan."⁶ To this day, the church serves as a primary meeting place for the Mohegan community.

By the mid-19th century, a large part of the Mohegans' land in Montville was held in common for the tribal membership, while certain plots were allocated to thirteen Mohegan families totaling 60 to 70 persons.⁷ State-appointed overseers rented the remaining portion of the land to non-Natives. Among the Mohegans, these overseers became notorious for their corruption and mismanagement, so in 1861, the nation petitioned for freedom from them. By 1872, the "reservation" was dissolved, excepting the Mohegan Church and tribal burial grounds. Yet the latter did not escape additional desecration; local development continued to impinge upon the site, making it necessary for the Mohegans, in 1899, to petition the Connecticut General Assembly for the right to sue for the Norwich Royal Burial Grounds. The Mohegans pursued their claim again in 1915, this time pressing their claim until 1935.

By the early 20th century, although the Mohegans' land base was reduced to the church site and all tribal members had officially

⁶ Speck, Frank G. 1928. Native Tribes and Dialects of Connecticut. In *The Forty-Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*. Washington, G.P.O., p. 254

⁷ *The Uncas Monument*. 1842. Souvenir newspaper published in conjunction with the erection of a monument to Uncas July 4, 1842 in Norwich, CT., M24. as cited in Soulsby, 1979.

become citizens of Connecticut, there was still a sense of nationhood. In 1920, many tribal members banded together and formed the Mohegan Indian Association. The group organized to insure the maintenance of the tribe's culture and to promote its social and political causes. The Association also worked to locate and reunite other Mohegans. In the late 1920s, the Association noted that the Mohegan population numbered 122, 31 of whom lived on or near Mohegan Hill, 73 in Norwich and New London, and 18 scattered throughout the area of New London County.⁸

During this period, the Mohegans also sought to capitalize on their earlier relationships with neighboring families and educate the newer generations about their history and culture. In 1931, Mohegan John Tantaquidgeon, along with his children Harold and Gladys, founded the Tantaquidgeon Museum, a repository for Mohegan artifacts as well as items from other tribes. Harold Tantaquidgeon believed that educating the non-Native public—raising their awareness and understanding—was a key to preserving Mohegan culture and nationhood. He expressed his reasoning in the following:

It's harder to hate someone that you know a lot about. One day when these kids grow up and it comes time for them to vote on Indian issues, they'll know enough about us to vote the right way.⁹

Gladys Tantaquidgeon contributed artifacts to the museum that she collected during her work and studies in other parts of Indian Country. She served as an educational administrator for the federal government working with northeastern tribes, as a social worker among the Yankton Sioux, and as a Native arts specialist

⁸ Speck, Frank (1928) Native tribes and Dialects in Connecticut. In *The Forty-Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*. Washington, G.P.O. pp. 212-213 as cited in Guilette, Mary E. (1979). *American Indians in Connecticut: Past to Present*. Prepared for the Connecticut Indian Affairs Council of the State of Connecticut. p. M25.

⁹ Fawcett, Melissa Jayne (1995) *The Lasting of the Mohegans, Part 1: The Story of the Wolf People*. The Mohegan Tribe, Uncasville, CT. p. 28.

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on the American Indian Arts and Crafts Board in the 1930s. Tantaquidgeon studied at the University of Pennsylvania under the tutelage of anthropologist Frank G. Speck, earning her Associates Degree. Speck conducted extensive fieldwork with the Mohegans in the early 20th century. Through Speck, Gladys met many Native leaders from all over the United States.

Harold Tantaquidgeon's mission to educate the non-Native public about Mohegan culture achieved success in a number of different ways. Local schoolchildren made annual visits to the Tantaquidgeon Museum and many visitors came from afar, evidenced by the collection of postcards gathered by the Tantaquidgeon family. The primary benefit of the Tantaquidgeon's efforts, however, manifested itself in the Mohegans' relationships with the local community. For example, the Mohegans prepared an exhibit for Montville's bicentennial in 1986 illustrating the enduring relationship of goodwill between the tribe and the townspeople. Mohegans Courtland Fowler and Gladys Tantaquidgeon served as marshals in the parade that accompanied the town's festivities. The town also dedicated its commemorative yearbook to Gladys and Harold Tantaquidgeon.

A HISTORY OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Such neighborly relations have many historical precedents. In 1842, the town of Norwich officially recognized the Mohegan sachem Uncas for his faithful relationship with the English colony. The town erected a stone monument in his memory at a ceremony attended by U.S. President Andrew Jackson.

Gladys Tantaquidgeon recalled attending a celebration in Norwich in 1909 of the 250th anniversary of Uncas' grant of Norwich to the English. President William Howard Taft attended, and Gladys remembers shaking his hand. The Mohegans' participation in such ceremonies was common. Gladys recounted, "On many different occasions, Mohegan Indians would be honored in Norwich and New London and

served dinners and would meet various dignitaries.”¹⁰ The Mohegans also participated regularly in Norwich’s annual Rose Arts parade, an event established in 1965, to represent their tribe.

In addition to these numerous ceremonial expressions, the city of Norwich articulated its relationship with the Mohegan tribe in a more formal way. On May 10, 1994, Norwich City Council President Harry A. Jackson issued a proclamation that commemorated the relationship of Norwich and its citizens with the Mohegan Nation:

Whereas, the City of Norwich, through generations, has held a relationship with the Chiefs of the Mohegan Nation; and

Whereas, in the year 1992, the City of Norwich signed a Treaty with Ralph Sturges, Chief of the Mohegan Nation, affirming an alliance regarding Yantic Falls; and

Whereas, the City of Norwich continues that friendship with Chief Ralph Sturges and the Mohegan Nation;

Now, therefore, I Council President Harry A. A. Jackson, on behalf of the Norwich City Council, do hereby affirm that friendship with Chief Ralph Sturges and the Mohegan Nation and trust that it will continue in the years to come.

In order to insure good relations between the tribe and the colony, and later the state, the Mohegans have made similar gestures of honor at their own ceremonies. In turn, the State of Connecticut has recognized continually the Mohegans. In 1986, the University of Connecticut created a scholarship in the name of Gladys Tantaquidgeon and presented her with an honorary doctorate in humane causes. Today’s good relations between the tribe and larger community are in large part a result of these ongoing diplomatic efforts.

¹⁰ Fawcett, Melissa Jayne. 2000. *Medicine Trail: The Life and Lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, p. 45.

CONTEMPORARY PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS

The Mohegans' efforts to create and maintain partnerships have paid dividends in areas that have both social and cultural significance for the tribe. For example, in 1992, the Mohegans joined forces with the Mashantucket Pequots of Ledyard, Connecticut, the Golden-Hill Paugussetts of Trumbull and Colchester, Connecticut, the Narragansetts of Charlestown, Rhode Island, and the City of Norwich to protest the proposed building of a hydroelectric plant in the Yantic Falls area of Norwich. Yantic Falls is a historic and sacred place for the Mohegans, as it is the site of Uncas' Leap, where the sachem Uncas is believed to have leapt over a chasm while being pursued by enemy Natives. Largely through the strength of their combined resistance, the Mohegans, the City of Norwich and their allies successfully thwarted the plan for the plant.

The relationship of open communication and trust between the Mohegans and neighboring communities was tested when the Mohegans applied for and attained federal recognition as an Indian tribe, an official distinction signifying a formal government-to-government relationship between the nation and the federal government. Often, local municipalities oppose tribes' bids for federal recognition, fearing a perceived "loss of local control" once a Native nation's sovereign rights are thus affirmed.

Although this is a common challenge, it proved to be less problematic for the Mohegans than for many Native nations. The Attorney General of Connecticut and the Town of Montville did oppose the attempt – but once the 974 members of the tribe received notice on March 7, 1994 that their bid for federal recognition had been successful, opposition began to subside. The Mohegan Tribe made concerted efforts to ease the concerns

of their neighboring communities, including payments in lieu of taxes¹¹, philanthropic outreach, and other good neighbor policies.

Once the Mohegan Nation received federal recognition, their longstanding land claims case also drew to a close. In 1995, the U.S. government placed 240 acres of the Mohegans' aboriginal territory, a parcel of land that lies on the western bank of the Thames River, in trust for the tribe. The Mohegans then received permission to purchase Fort Shantok, a historic Mohegan site; it too was put into trust.

Soon after achieving federal recognition, the Mohegans forged a compact with the State of Connecticut allowing Class III gaming, and in 1996, the tribe opened the Mohegan Sun Casino. The Mohegans' tribal-state compact mandated an annual contribution of 25 percent of slot revenues to the State of Connecticut—contributions that have bolstered state government resources and, in turn, the state economy. In 2003, for example, the combined payment by the Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot tribes to the State of Connecticut was more than \$400 million.

Mohegan Sun contributes to the state's economy in other ways as well. Each day it welcomes more than 30,000 visitors, many of whom not only visit the casino, but also visit nearby towns, frequent their businesses, and take part in local tourist activities. Additionally, the tribe and its various economic enterprises employ approximately 10,000 people, which helps keep the unemployment rate in southeastern Connecticut quite low. Overall, the significance of the tribe's casino as a major economic engine for the larger regional economy cannot be overstated.¹²

¹¹ The Mohegan Nation agreed to pay the town of Montville \$500,000 annually to replace the taxes lost for the property upon which the casino sits.

¹² A growing body of research in Indian Country points to the substantial multiplier effects that tribal gaming can have for the counties, regions and states in which tribal gaming facilities are located. Cornell and Taylor find, for example, that tribal casino operations in the State of Arizona annually

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During this era of gaming, the Mohegan Tribe has worked hard to maintain mutually beneficial relationships with neighboring communities. For example, it built a \$35 million access road to make the Mohegan Sun casino accessible from area highways so as not to interfere with local traffic.

The former mayor of Montville, Russ Beetham, grew up on Mohegan Hill with Mohegans as neighbors. He attended the Mohegan Church and was a member of the Mohegan Youth Fellowship. Beetham made a vow at the time the Mohegans opened their casino: “We (the Town of Montville and the Mohegan Tribe) will live together, we will work together, we will grow together, and we will share together.”¹³ According to members of the tribe and the local community, it is the close personal relationship between leaders and residents from both communities, as well as an ongoing commitment to collaboration, which most profoundly influences community relations.

Mohegan historian Melissa Tantaquidgeon summarized the approach the nation has adopted in its relations with non-Indian neighbors in the following:

We have to consider the concerns of the community. Their concerns are weighed in. The tribe is very careful about that. The people in Montville have a very good relationship with the tribe. Non-Indians are part of the community.¹⁴

spend hundreds of millions of dollars on goods and services, much of which comes from non-Indian vendors and suppliers; produce thousands of jobs for non-Indians as well as tribal members; and generate tens of millions of dollars in added federal and state payroll taxes and even more in extra state and local sales taxes (Cornell, Stephen and Jonathan B. Taylor. 2001. *An Analysis of the Economic Impacts of Indian Gaming in the State of Arizona*. Tucson: Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, the University of Arizona).

¹³ Russ Beetham, Symposium on Intergovernmental Agreements, Harvard University, May 6, 2003.

¹⁴ Melissa Tantaquidgeon, Museum Authority, personal communication, March 17, 2003.

Thomas Acevedo, the Mohegan Tribe's Chief of Staff, said the following about the nation's relationship with the citizens of Montville:

They are really viewed as one and the same, together. In fact, many of the key officials that work for the tribe in various capacities are residents of Montville and, likewise, served on the Montville Town Council in the past. That bodes well for the tribe and also for the officials, in terms of their understanding and willingness to work with the tribe.¹⁵

Montville is not the only community that has benefited from the gaming enterprises of its Indian neighbors. In Norwich, defense industry cutbacks in the early 1990s increased local unemployment and reduced municipal revenues. Mayor Arthur Lathrop summarized the impact of Indian gaming on his city:

To use a gaming analogy, and to sum it all up, we now have a hand to play. We had no hand to play, we had no future in Norwich, prior to the opening of Foxwoods (the casino of the Mashantucket-Pequots) and then the Mohegan Sun.¹⁶

NATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MADE POSSIBLE BY FEDERAL RECOGNITION AND INDIAN GAMING

Federal recognition and subsequent casino development marked a turning point for the Mohegan Tribe, affording it the chance to provide, as a sovereign government, a new range of services to its members. The organization of the tribal government, the nation's allocation of tribal revenues, and its commitment to paying down its debt for the casino expansion, all reflect the priorities of the Mohegan Tribe—in particular, a dedication to

¹⁵ Thomas Acevedo, Symposium on Intergovernmental Agreements, Harvard University, May 6, 2003.

¹⁶ Arthur Lathrop, Symposium on Intergovernmental Agreements, Harvard University, May 6, 2003.

investing in its people's futures, a goal demonstrated first by Uncas and his forebears.

Separating the Governing Functions of the Tribe

After federal recognition, one of the tribe's first governance projects was to build an administrative body comparable to a civil service corps that could implement policies developed by the elected tribal council. In this model, the overall structure of the tribal government maintains a clear and important distinction between the duties of tribal elected officials and tribal administrators. Elected officials serve as the policy makers and are responsible for thinking about the overall, long-term wellbeing of the nation. Complementing this work, the tribal administration implements the council's policies, remaining distant from political decision-making processes, distance which facilitates effective and efficient program management and service delivery to tribal members. According to Chief of Staff Acevedo, "Mohegan is a good example of not doing it like everybody else."¹⁷

This clear separation of responsibilities similarly is evident in the operation of the Mohegan Gaming Commission, although it takes on a rather unusual form. Looking only at organizational structure, the commission is "more like a gaming department," than a board apart from tribal government. Indeed, there is no formal separation between the Mohegan Tribal Council and Gaming Commission. Looking deeper, however, it appears that a separation of powers has been integrated into tribal political culture to such an extent that when elected officials attempt to interfere in regulation duties, "social pressure yanks them back into line."¹⁸

¹⁷ Thomas Acevedo, Chief of Staff, Mohegan Tribe, personal communication, March 18, 2003.

¹⁸ Ibid. It is also worth noting that this model is comparable to the socially bound separation of powers found at Cochiti Pueblo (Cornell, Stephen and Joseph P. Kalt. 1997. "Successful Economic Development and Heterogeneity of Governmental Form on American Indian Reservations." In *Getting Good Government: Capacity Building in the Public Sectors of Developing*

Investment in Education

The Mohegan Tribe believes that its primary investment should be in the education of its members. Tribal members can attend college at no personal expense to themselves, a benefit that has led many to pursue higher education. Another important educational investment is the Mohegan Tribe's daycare center, which provides a mentoring program as well as a gathering place for children and early adolescents. Tribal youth do their homework at the daycare center, make arts and crafts, and play games. The staff arranges regular field trips to destinations such as ice-skating shows, the circus, and zoos. Tribal youth also are given training in skills such as first aid, CPR, and babysitting. In the summer, the tribe offers a nine-week camp program for children twelve years of age and younger.

Investment in Housing

The Mohegan Housing Authority aims to provide affordable and safe housing for all members of the nation. Its responsibilities include managing thirty single-family homes and nine apartment buildings adjacent to the reservation, which it has owned since 1996 and rents to tribal citizens and non-member casino employees. Originally, the Mohegan Tribe intended to use a \$2.2 million Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant for this housing investment, but it instead chose to use revenues from its increasingly successful casino to make the purchase and returned the grant money to HUD. As part of its ongoing effort to achieve self-sufficiency, the nation has never used HUD funding for any of its housing programs.

The Mohegan Housing Authority also has set up a mortgage program with a local bank—with the tribe as a partial guarantor—to assist tribal members with purchasing homes.¹⁹ Since its inception, the program has helped 188 Mohegan

Countries, ed. Merilee S. Grindle. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Institute for International Development. pp. 257-296.

¹⁹ Further evidence of partnership is the fact that this local bank also provides small business and personal loans to tribal members.

members to become first-time homeowners. Importantly, the home loan program is only one part of a larger home purchase and improvement program, which includes assistance with closing costs; grants to pay for pre-purchase radon, water, and pest inspections; support in the acquisition of home improvement loans; and the installation or repair of well and septic systems in members' homes.

Finally, the housing authority offers a range of services to non-owners. A rental assistance program supports tribal citizens who are on the waiting list for tribal housing. An emergency housing assistance program covers damages incurred by catastrophic events. Finally, the tribe uses the revenues from gaming to entirely fund the tribe's elderly housing center, which currently has 36 apartments.

The Mohegan Sun's Role

The ability to accomplish the aforementioned is best attributed to the success of the Mohegan Sun Casino as well as the diligent efforts of the Mohegan Tribe to maintain historical continuity. The casino provides the capital for the tribe to accomplish its broader, long-term goals. Even the etymology of the casino's name is indicative of its role in the community. "Mohegan" in the Mohegan language means "The Wolf People," referring to the fact that the Mohegan Tribe was once the Wolf Clan. "Sun" in Mohegan actually means "rock." Rocks traditionally served as gathering places for the Mohegan, places where important meetings were held. The name "Mohegan Sun," then, translates to "The Rock of the Wolf People," or "The Foundation of the Wolf People."²⁰ The name provides one of the many links between the casino and the culture and goals of the Mohegan Nation, a link that the untrained eye may not readily recognize.

A central challenge of designing the Mohegan Sun Casino involved striking a balance between the artistic desires of designer David Rockwell and his team and the Mohegans'

²⁰ Melissa Tantaquidgeon, Tribal Historian, personal communication, March 17, 2003.

insistence that cultural design elements incorporated into the casino be genuinely Mohegan. According to tribal historian Melissa Tantaquidgeon, “The difficulty was in trying to explain how subtle differences made something look Mohegan versus not Mohegan.”²¹

Before the design process commenced, the tribe decided that it wanted aspects of Mohegan culture integrated into the design of the casino. Since this would be the first structure of its kind for the tribe, the tribe held several meetings during the design process to discuss which elements of Mohegan culture should be highlighted by the casino. Tantaquidgeon summarized it this way: “We realized there isn’t a single building in the world built with a Mohegan influence. We wanted people to come here and feel like they were entering a Mohegan world.”²²

To that end, the final design of the casino reflects Mohegan culture and traditions down to the last detail. Visual symbols representative of the Mohegan-Pequot language are used as media of cultural expression throughout the casino. The facility’s external frontispiece, composed of two geometric towers of reflective mirrored glass, was designed to resemble the quartz crystals that are plentiful in the region. “Traditional Mohegan architecture was low and flat,” said Tantaquidgeon, “but we had limited land on which to build the facility, so we had to adapt.” Inside the casino, nearly every design element reflects some salient aspect of Mohegan culture. Marks in the casino floor represent the vertical stratification of the earth. Painted skins decorate the walls of the “Earth” casino. The “Sky” casino is adorned with large-scale replicas of traditional Mohegan beads. Other traditional design elements used include turkey feathers, corn husks, and birch bark.

LIVING HISTORY

Ultimately, the Mohegan Sun casino is representative of both the nation’s past as well as its future. In the words of Melissa

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

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Tantaquidgeon, “the casino is about the trilogy of past, present and future.”²³ Indeed, the Mohegan Tribe values its past and the lessons it provides, including the knowledge that creating and sustaining relationships generates stability and facilitates success.

According to Tantaquidgeon, certain long-lived Mohegan women carried forward these cultural traditions dating back to Uncas. Beginning with Lucy Occum, who lived from the 1730’s until the 1820’s, these women were responsible for passing down the tribe’s culture to the younger generations. Occum, who “wouldn’t have known Uncas but would have known people who knew him and heard firsthand stories about him,”²⁴ was responsible for the teaching of Martha Uncas. Born in 1768, Martha Uncas was described as a “matriarch” who was primarily responsible for preserving significant pieces of Mohegan culture that have survived to this day. In her long lifetime, which lasted until 1859, Martha Uncas had five husbands, each from a different bloodline within the tribe. She taught younger members of the tribe about traditional Mohegan culture. One of those was Emma Baker, who was born in 1828. Baker—who lived until 1916—and Fidelia Fielding together helped raise Gladys Tantaquidgeon, the tribe’s late 20th century medicine woman, introducing her to the customs of her tribe. Born in 1899, Gladys Tantaquidgeon, whose image graces a statue that stands in the entrance to the old Mohegan Sun casino, was the most recent link in this chain between contemporary Mohegans and their history and culture. The Tantaquidgeon Museum which she maintained for many decades, is the oldest Indian-owned museum in the United States. The story of these four women, according to Melissa Tantaquidgeon, Gladys’ grand-niece, provides a “sense of connectedness.”²⁵

The Mohegans continue to pass on their cultural traditions, carrying on the practice of connecting the future to the past. The casino plays a pivotal role in this process by generating the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

revenue for tribal investment in the future while also memorializing the past. For example, the last fluent speaker of the Mohegan-Pequot language was Fidelia Fielding, who died in 1908. Because of the availability of gaming revenues for cultural investment, the tribe is developing a language curriculum that can be taught to tribal members, connecting them once again with their Mohegan-Pequot language. Meanwhile, one of the restaurants at the Mohegan Sun is named Fidelia's, in honor of Fidelia Fielding. As Melissa Tantaquidgeon reminds visitors,

While the casino is an economic engine for us, it is also the place where we can express who we are and remember why it is that we have thrived here for so many generations. It is a symbol of the success of our strategy to create strong relationships with our neighbors and to invest in our tribe's future above all else.²⁶

²⁶ Ibid.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The information for this case study was compiled during 2003 and 2004. Every attempt has been made to ensure the accuracy of facts, figures, and accounts as of April 9, 2004. Any remaining errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors.