



Contact: Nancy Conrad
Ph. 760-699-6928
nconrad@aguacaliente.net

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AGUA CALIENTE BAND OF CAHUILLA INDIANS UNVEILS PEON GAMES SCULPTURE
Tribe celebrates cultural connection to Indian Gaming

PALM SPRINGS, Calif., – July 15, 2008 – The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians have unveiled in Rancho Mirage a granite sculpture by renowned artist Doug Hyde depicting the traditional peon (pronounced pay-OWN) games played by Cahuilla people.

Tribal members gathered at sunset Monday, July 14, as Chairman Richard M. Milanovich unveiled the 16-foot sculpture depicting the popular game of chance historically played by Native Americans around a campfire. A plaque commemorating the sculptures was also installed at the corner of Bob Hope and Ramon in Rancho Mirage.

The plaque says,

“The hunters represent our ancestors and the sculptures, in granite, their strength. We are unable to hold the wind and sunlight that pass through their cut out images, but spirit and strength are in our hearts. They stand behind us like the hunter sculpture stands behind the peon players. Peon players on the corner are there to challenge all people who pass by to play against them. The Agua Caliente players know that this is more than just a game of chance. It is a way to engage and test their opponents.”

Hyde, of Native American descent, is known locally for his monument “Two Women” installed on the median at the corner of Tahquitz Canyon Way and Indian Canyon Way across from the Spa Resort Casino Hotel, as well as the landmark “Cahuilla Maiden” commemorating the Agua Caliente hot springs. He also has his artwork on display at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

“We’re very pleased to be able to bring Doug’s art to yet another location in the valley,” said Milanovich. “We think this is a fitting way to tie our cultural history to today’s games going on in the Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa. This will be a highly visible piece for drivers passing by.”

Peon games (known as “teponish” {pronounced TEP-own-ish} in the Cahuilla language) traditionally involved two teams of people who played against each other while in front of the fire. Today, the game is still played and has basically remained the same. Each player has a black and a white stick or coyote bone. Players hide the bones in their hands, and the other team has to guess which hand the bones are held in for each player on the team. Bets may be taken on how the bones are held.

Family or friends support their teams while players typically hold a “poker face” to psyche out their opponents.

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About the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians

The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians is a federally recognized Indian tribe located in Palm Springs, Calif., with 31,500 acres of reservation lands that spread across Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, and into the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto mountains. The 424-member tribe currently owns and operates the Spa Resort Casino and Hotel in downtown Palm Springs and the Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa in Rancho Mirage.