

Celebrating 10 Years of Chumash Strength



It's been a decade since Vincent Armenta was first elected to the office of Tribal Chairman of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians in December 1999 – and what a decade it has been. In ten short years, this small 149-member tribe has gone from relative obscurity to being one of the most successful tribes in California – and many credit Chairman Armenta for this transformation.

"It has been one action-filled decade," said Armenta. "I've said it many times, but it truly feels like I now have an MBA, along with degrees in psychology and political science. I've had to be a quick study on every subject from strategic planning to economic development to learning how to build productive teams."

The tribe's business enterprises, including its booming Chumash Casino Resort on the Santa Ynez Reservation, popular Hotel Corque and Root 246 restaurant in nearby Solvang, keeps Chairman Armenta and his fellow business committee members busy ensuring that the tribe stays on top of its game.

Back In 1999

When Chairman Armenta was first elected, he entered a world that he previously only viewed from afar. Members of his family were involved in tribal politics, but it wasn't a path that he thought he would take. As a welder by trade, he was busy running his own business in 1999 when a few members of the tribe approached him about running for Tribal Chairman to fill a spot vacated by a former tribal leader who had resigned.

"Although my father and older brothers were involved in tribal politics, it wasn't something I had originally considered because I was focused on building my business and supporting my family," said Armenta. "But after a few members approached me and told me that I had the support of many tribal members, I thought I would give it a try."

Little did he know that ten years later he would still be going strong. He has won every election since (the tribe elects its leadership team every two years) and one year he ran unopposed.

A Decade of Dedication

The decisions made by Chairman Armenta and members of the business committee over the years have resulted in an impressive list of significant milestones over the past decade.

In 2002 Armenta went on a road show to present his tribe to institutional investors across the country and discuss with them the possibility of investing in the tribe's vision. At the end of the two-week journey, Banc of America Securities issued \$150 million in bonds, which was the first high yield bond financing deal for a California tribe.

The Business Committee, along with the design/build



Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Business Committee. Chairman Vincent Armenta (seated, left). Back row l to r: Secretary/Treasurer Kenneth Kahn, Gary Pace. Front row l to r: Vice Chairman Richard Gomez, David Dominguez.

10 years

team, worked tirelessly on the casino consolidation project to make the tribal vision a reality. The tribe opened the doors to its consolidated casino in 2003 and its new hotel in 2004, marking a new era for the tribe. Both the Chumash Casino Resort hotel and its fine dining restaurant, The Willows, are four diamond-rated by AAA's Automobile Club of Southern California.

Expanding the Vision

The tribal leadership team also focuses on economic development projects to help diversify the tribe's portfolio. To date, the tribe has purchased two gas stations, invested in a local bank, and purchased a hotel and restaurant in the nearby town of Solvang.

Soon after the tribe purchased the hotel and restaurant – formerly known as the Royal Scandinavian Inn and the Meadows Restaurant – a major renovation began. In addition, the tribe hired celebrity chef Bradley Ogden to create an entirely new restaurant that met the standards of Chumash.

When the newly-renovated property was re-opened, the hotel and restaurant emerged with an entirely new face and name. Hotel Corque was appropriately named for its proximity to Santa Barbara County's premiere wine country. The restaurant Root 246 was named to convey the farm-to-table freshness that Chef Ogden employs in his menus and also for its location right off Highway 246.

Tribal Heritage Honored

While building a solid economic foundation has been a priority in his decade as Tribal Chairman, Armenta has also played a significant role in preserving and highlighting the tribe's cultural heritage.

From resurrecting the tribe's language to having a highway designated the "Chumash Highway" to participating in an annual event where descendants from various Chumash nations cross the Santa Barbara Channel in a tomol (a traditional mode of Chumash transportation), Chairman Armenta and the Santa Ynez Chumash nation have worked diligently to honor their heritage.



Tomol Crossing 2006

Tribal Global Picture

Over the years, Chairman Armenta and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians have been involved in the political arena on local, state and national level. Locally, Armenta has participated in the protection of marine life and submerged Chumash cultural sites and has also worked on establishing a solid government-to-government relationship with Vandenberg Air Force Space Command to protect cultural resources on base. He has also played an active role in creating policy pertaining to Native American tribes across the country. Chairman Armenta was asked to testify and provide counsel and advice to the United States House of Representatives House Natural Resources Committee on the important national Indian Country issue of placing land into trust.

Community Contributions

With 1,600 employees, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians contributes significantly to the local economy. Under Chairman Armenta's direction, the tribe has also contributed through its Santa Ynez Chumash Foundation.

To date, the tribe's foundation has donated more than \$13 million to the community, which also includes donations to Indian Country. Last fall the tribe donated \$20,000 to the Blackfeet Tribe in Montana for its school gymnasium. Also helping the community, a new Santa Ynez Tribal Health Clinic was built in 2002 that serves Santa Ynez tribal members, California Indians and a segment of the local community that could not otherwise afford health care.

"It's been an exciting decade for the Santa Ynez Chumash," said one tribal member. "Our tribal leadership team, led by Chairman Armenta, has taken us on a journey that seems like a dream." ♣

For more information about the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, visit www.santaynezchumash.org.

