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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**National Native American Human Resources Association (NNAHRA) Announces
Winners of the 2023 Sam Henny Award and the HR Leader of the Year Award**

WASHINGTON D.C. – October 24, 2023 — The National Native American Human Resources Association (NNAHRA) set the stage for an unforgettable 27th Annual HR Conference, hosted at the Gila River Casino & Resort in Chandler, AZ from September 25 to 27. This sold-out event proved to be a hub of innovation and excellence, showcasing the very best in the field of Native American human resources, with 750 attendees. During this conference, two individuals were recognized with the Sam Henny Award and as the 2023 HR Leader of the Year.

NNAHRA is a nonprofit organization comprised of professionals employed for a Native American Tribe or a tribal enterprise. The organization truly understands the challenges and opportunities facing professionals and their organizations and aims to help and create real systems and solutions. Every year, NNAHRA hosts a conference to present all HR professionals and tribal leaders with information solutions, education and an opportunity to network with others working in Indian Country.

The Sam Henny Mentorship Award is a recognition that is inspired and based on Sam Henny, an early leader in the development of programs and policies to mentor tribal members into leadership roles. Her work at the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde motivated many other tribes to introduce similar programs based on her early work and foundation-building skills. While she has passed on, NNAHRA celebrates her life and work by presenting the annual Sam Henny Award. The award recognizes tribes with successful tribal programs that promote mentorship, succession planning or other areas of leadership.

“On behalf of NNAHRA and for me personally, it is a privilege to work with such influential individuals and properties who truly inspire and motivate us all. We are so pleased to have both Gila River Resort and Casinos and Twana Williams represent NNAHRA with these two prestigious awards,” says Judy Wright, President of NNAHRA.

This year, the recipient of the award went to Gila River Resorts & Casinos and was accepted on their behalf by Norma Perez, the Mentee Assistant Director. Perez has personally participated in the program that Gila River has created which has been successful in fulfilling the promotion of mentorship.

“With the guidance and support from our leadership team, we have created an incredible program to professionally advance team members of the Gila River Indian Community,” said Perez. “This mentorship program has produced incredible leaders as they learn the intricacies of operating a



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successful gaming enterprise. We are grateful to shed light on our program to inspire other tribal communities to implement similar programs to grow leaders from within.”

In addition to the Sam Henny Award, NNAHRA awarded Twana Williams, Director of Organizational Development for the Choctaw Nation as the HR Leader for 2023. This award requires a demonstrated level of accomplishment in three to four different areas: leadership, organizational impact, commitment to HR profession and dedication to the mentoring and development of future tribal human resource leaders. The award recognizes model Human Resources leaders who contribute to their organization by improving their tribal organization’s bottom line, achieving business results, demonstrating leadership or developing innovative programs.

“I’m humbled and honored to receive the NNAHRA – HR Leader of the Year Award,” said Williams. “It meant so much to me that my OD team nominated me. I appreciate them and the work that we get to do for the Choctaw Nation.”

The National Native American Human Resources Association extends its heartfelt congratulations to both Gila River Resorts and Casinos for receiving the Sam Henny Award and to Williams for being recognized as the HR Leader of the Year for 2023. Their dedication to excellence in tribal programs and Human Resources leadership is an inspiration to all.

For more information on NNAHRA or the annual conference, please contact Judy Wright at jwright@nnahra.org or [click here](#). For media inquiries, please contact Bianca Kasawdish Bianca@TeamInnoVision.com.

ABOUT NNAHRA

The National Native American Human Resources Association is a nonprofit organization, with a membership comprised of HR professionals and tribal leaders working for a Native American Tribe. Association business is conducted by an elected Board of Directors who serve four-year terms, in a volunteer capacity, and all of whom work directly for Human Resources or tribal enterprises. Historically, the association started out as a grassroots effort with four tribes meeting to network and share personnel issues and challenges nearly twenty-six years ago. The meetings evolved into conferences, and the membership grew into a formal northwest and then national association. What started with four members is now over 2,000 strong. For more information, please visit <https://nnahra.org/>.