



START IN INDIAN COUNTRY: I designed my first tribal Indian project prior to the forming of TBE in 1963, “The Cherokee Heritage Center,” a design based upon my architectural design thesis at the University of Colorado.

FIRST TRIBAL PROJECT: The firm’s first tribal project constructed was the “Trail of Tears” Amphitheater near Tahlequah, OK in 1968, as part of the Cherokee Heritage Center project. Our first significant tribal gaming project was the Ho Chunk Casino & Hotel located in Baraboo, WI in 1998.

MOST MEMORABLE PROJECT: After working with 109 different Native American tribes and First Nations to date, it is obviously a difficult question to answer – as they have each been memorable in their own unique way. Satisfying the tribe’s individual needs is of utmost importance, thereby requiring different design solutions for each project. However, certain significant projects do come to mind as helping to define our firm’s project history: Cherokee Casino, which is now the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tulsa; Buffalo Thunder Resort & Casino in Santa Fe, NM; Morongo Casino Resort & Spa near Palm Springs, CA; the Eastern Shawnee’s Indigo Sky Casino & Hotel in Wyandotte, OK; and Tunica-Biloxi’s Paragon Casino Resort in Marksville, LA.

One of my favorite projects was Buffalo Thunder with the Pojoaque Pueblo. The governor at the time was George Rivera, and he was heavily involved. He’s just an unbelievable artist and he came to our St. Louis office and sat down with our designers. They’d sketch and he’d sketch. A lot of that project’s success I relate to his input.

For the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe’s Paragon Casino Resort in Marksville, LA, they needed people to come to their facility from Houston, TX and surrounding areas if they were going to have any great success. So they were looking for something they could do that would be a big draw. We did this really great atrium there and we put live alligators in it. A lot of work went into making the environment suitable for alligators at the casino. They kid the players and say, “Now, if we catch you cheating in the casino, we’ll feed you to the alligators!” They have a really good time with that – it’s really a fun property.

CRITICAL ASPECTS: Getting into the “mind” of the tribe and helping them fulfill their vision for their children and grandchildren – thus creating their own unique project. Taking the culture and vision of the tribe and incorporating those aspects into their own unique brand identity is important to the project’s success. My experience has been that visitors to the facility really enjoy when the Native American culture is expressed in the project. But when tribal

members see their culture being incorporated, they take ownership. All of the sudden, it’s not just a project – it’s their project.

Differentiating the tribal casino facility from the competition’s and raising the guest experience is a critical part of the project’s approach. When you do that, you end up with something that is not only a good facility for gaming, but good for the tribe and its members.

BALANCING DESIGN WITH ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS: Most of our team has been together for between fifteen to thirty years. Basically, they have become very, very skilled at working with budgets. Anyone can do great design with large budgets, but those who do great design on tight budgets are the really skilled designers. We strive for that. We believe spending money where it makes the greatest impact and has the most value as an income generator is critical. Each venue needs to be studied for the greatest return-on-investment. Each of the spaces in the property needs to stay current in market trend uses, asking the question, “can this space be used in multiple ways?” The facility’s flexibility, opportunities for multi-purpose uses, and ROI factors need to be addressed, without losing sight of attractive and affordable design.

TRENDS: As the Indian gaming market matures, tribes are looking at ways to expand and capitalize on new economic growth opportunities – but without losing sight of gaming as their main revenue source. Gaming is the catalyst for tribal diversification. Thus, due to increased competition and market saturation, the tribal gaming operators are looking for ways to refresh their properties.

Even the very profitable casinos in the larger market areas are in need of adapting to the changing demographic environments; i.e., the younger generation of gaming patrons view gaming in combination with social media forms. We as architects need to have those design discussions with our clients.

Finding ways to maintain and attract new gaming customers for the tribe’s property is on everyone’s minds. How to bring an element of crispness, but keep stagnation at bay is what we are focusing on with clients.

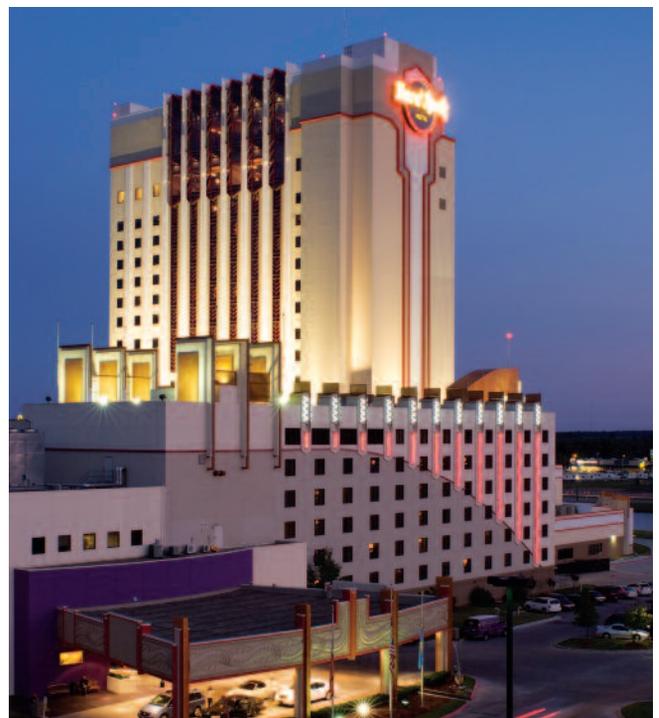
THE FUTURE: We remain totally committed to serving Indian Country over the long haul. We desire to help tribes to grow into all they can be – economically, culturally and individually. Therefore, our future is tied to Indian Country and to the future of the tribes – when they succeed, we feel we have succeeded as well. This requires us to be innovators in how we deliver our services to the tribes, bringing expertise and value to all we do. It requires us to stay focused on their evolving needs and challenges, without losing sight of their unique histories and cultures. We believe that if we take care of the tribes - the Great Spirit will take care of us. Our future is bright.



Buffalo Thunder Resort & Casino - Santa Fe, NM



Indigo Sky Casino - Wyandotte, OK



Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tulsa - Catoosa, OK

TBE ARCHITECTS



Paragon Casino Resort - Marksville, LA

