

# INDIAN COUNTRY

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TODAY

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## Eagle center receives \$500,000 donation

Staff reports

WELCH, Minn. – The Prairie Island Indian Community presented a \$500,000 check to the National Eagle Center in Wabasha on Aug. 22. This donation nearly completes the organization's fund-raising goal of \$4.3 million to build the first-ever, nationally-recognized center dedicated to honoring and preserving the United States' symbol of strength and freedom – the eagle. The groundbreaking ceremony took place this morning near the Mississippi River in Wabasha.

Prairie Island's donation is earmarked specifically for construction of the National Eagle Center's new facility, which will be the first of its kind in the nation and has an expected completion date of fall 2007.

"This donation has assured us that the cost of the bricks and mortar will be covered," stated Don Jacoby, vice president of the Wabasha Port Authority and co-chair of the National Eagle Center Capital Campaign. "Without this assistance we would not be able to continue our mission of honoring, preserving and experiencing our nation's most majestic creature."

The new 14,000-square-foot National Eagle Center expects 100,000 annual visitors and will eventually house up to 10 rescued eagles that are unable to survive in the wild. This is a vast improvement over the current 2,000-square-foot structure, which

houses three eagles and receives approximately 28,000 visitors annually.

Featuring an observation deck with an exceptional view of the Mississippi River, the new center will offer exhibits and educational programs including the importance of the eagle to Native American culture. With close spiritual ties to the eagle, the Prairie Island Indian Community hopes its support of the National Eagle Center will help ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to learn about and appreciate this important piece of their culture.

"The eagle and its feathers are sacred and highly revered in our traditions, culture and religion," said Audrey Bennett, Prairie Island Indian Community tribal council president. "They represent balance, truth and strength as well as courage, wisdom and freedom."

As they have done for nearly a decade, the Prairie Island Indian Community and the National Eagle Center will continue to strengthen their valuable relationship and work together in their educational efforts. "We are proud to now be in a position to support organizations such as the National Eagle Center," remarked Bennett. "We are pleased with their efforts and appreciate their willingness to work to preserve such an important piece of our cultural heritage."

Since 1994, the Prairie Island Indian Community has donated more than \$12 million to many Indian and non-Indian causes. The Prairie Island Indian Community is a federally recognized Indian nation, located 35 minutes southeast of the Twin Cities along the Mississippi River. The Prairie Island Indian Community owns and operates Treasure Island Resort and Casino.

PHOTO COURTESY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

