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STATE OF NEVADA
INDIAN COMMISSION

WHITE PAPER

Stewart Indian School Legacy Endangered

The State of Nevada Stewart Facility is a 110-acre historic district that is home to over 50 historic buildings comprising the former Stewart Indian School. The District is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and its structures are deteriorating rapidly. Many of the buildings were built in the early 1900's and sit unoccupied, adding the urgency to protect these buildings. The Stewart Indian School operated from 1890 to 1980 with a federal mandate to educate American Indian children, initially from the Great Basin Tribes (Washoe, Northern and Southern Paiute, and Western Shoshone), but eventually accepting children from tribal nations of the entire region. The intent of the Indian boarding school was to educate American Indian children so they could take their place in the greater society and away from their culture and traditions. There is only one of these sites in Nevada and it is a national treasure worthy of preservation.

The closing of the Stewart Indian School occurred in 1980 and the land conveyed to the State of Nevada in 1982. The quitclaim deed explicitly states as Provision 10, "The State of Nevada wishing to perpetuate the 90-year history of the Stewart Indian School will reserve Building 1 and Building 3 to house and display the crafts, artifacts and the memorabilia relating to the Stewart Indian School." And, further, that "If at any time the Secretary of the Interior determines that the Grantee has failed to observe the provisions of this transfer agreement and that the failure has continued for at least one year, he may declare a forfeiture of the conveyance and the title conveyed shall thereupon revert to the United States." Therefore, compliance with the deed provision is necessary or the entire conveyance to the state shall be reverted to the United States, a very real risk the Nevada Indian Commission does not take lightly.

As the historic buildings of the Stewart Indian School age and decline so too do the alumni who inhabited these historic halls. The eldest of the alumni (now in their mid to upper 90's) with so many memories and so much history are aging and dying. And, with them the many memories die. Just last year, we lost Velma Harjo a 1944 Stewart Indian School graduate. We must save these stories. We must save the legacy of the Stewart Indian School. We must accelerate the project to capture these authentic historical accounts.

The Nevada Indian Commission's initial action to preserve some of the oral histories of alumni was the development of an interpretive trail implemented in 2007. The Stewart Indian School Trail is a self-guided cell phone walking tour of the campus that includes 20 audio recordings of alumni and former

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employees of the historic school who tell their stories and share this largely unknown and seldom taught history with visitors of today.

The scope of what we have envisioned for the Stewart campus has been limited and includes a permanent Cultural Center located in a renovated building formerly used as the school's administration office and student union (Building 1). An on-campus facility will provide visitors, alumni and students with the story of the school's history. Exhibits depicting the daily life of the Indian student at Stewart would include musical band instruments, uniforms, athletic trophies and awards, the school's hall of fame, school photos and other memorabilia. Initiation of a school archive and oral history projects are also envisioned for the Cultural Center.

The Cultural Center will provide 5,545 square feet on three levels. The first level is planned for primary display areas to exhibit museum and archive collections with office and reception space. The upper level provides environmentally controlled storage space for collections along with additional display area for special collections and office space if needed. The lower level will provide educational space for cultural classes. The area surrounding the Cultural Center provides a lush grassy landscape, which can be developed to provide ceremony grounds for outdoor performances and a native landscape garden.

The conceptual scheme of the Cultural Center is to keep the history alive of the American Indian student at the boarding school and the evolution of the Stewart Indian School from the 1880's to the 1980 closing. The Cultural Center should celebrate American Indian culture and facilitate cross-cultural understanding while promoting educational tourism and economic development in the area. With construction of U.S. Highway 395 to loop around Carson City adjacent to the Stewart Facility, accessibility of visitors will be greatly increased.

The vision has since broadened to provide sustainability to the Cultural Center, ensure the history is told and additional Stewart campus buildings are rehabilitated. The new vision is of the Stewart Indian School as a destination. This is a place where families and international travelers could come and spend the entire day or purchase a package to experience overnight what it was like to live at the Stewart Indian School. A group of buildings could be rehabilitated and restored for visitation and interpretation, giving each visitor an opportunity to put themselves in the shoes of a Stewart Indian School student. One could visit the Stewart Indian Cultural Center, dine in the Dining Hall, visit a classroom and then view a play or movie in the campus auditorium before retiring for the evening in a dorm room. The learning opportunities for the public and tribal communities are numerous and would include restoration components of the traditional (lost) arts, tribal histories, tribal demonstrations, youth summer camps and artist retreats (traditional and contemporary).

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The Nevada Indian Commission is the primary agency coordinating events and fundraising for all phases. The overall effort is targeted as a community action project to be supported by contributions from businesses, individuals with possible state and tribal support. Grants, endowments and philanthropic contributions are being sought. Annual powwow gatherings and other events along with on-site donations by visitors will provide contributions toward the on-going operations. The potential establishment of a foundation or charitable fund with interest on a principal fund could be used to support annual operations.

Future native and non-native generations will benefit from your support and participation. This project includes many stakeholders and all must collaborate to be successful. The aged and deteriorating buildings, the real risk of property reversion to the federal government and aging alumni necessitate your involvement now, before the opportunity is lost. For more information contact:

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