



Sheraton Grand

AT WILD HORSE PASS

GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY

The Gila River Indian Community is the largest Indian reservation in the Phoenix area. It comprises 372,000 acres and covers 600 square miles. It is located southeast of metropolitan Phoenix, bordering Phoenix, Chandler and Gilbert. The GRIC is just minutes from the heart of Phoenix, 11.5 miles from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, and 70 miles from Tucson.

ABOUT THE TRIBES:

The population of the Pima (Akimel O'otham or River People) and Maricopa (Pee Posh) is more than 22,000. The Akimel O'otham proudly trace their roots to the ancient Hohokam (or Huhugam, meaning "those who have gone"). These early people farmed the Gila River Valley from 300 B.C. to 1450 A.D. and developed extensive irrigation systems by digging hundreds of miles of canals to supply water to their fields. The irrigated crops included maize, squash, lima beans, tobacco and cotton and were supplemented with the gathering of cactus fruit, prickly pear pads, cholla cactus buds and agave from the harsh desert. The Hohokam mysteriously vanished centuries ago, leaving behind their irrigation system of canals, a system that is still used to supply water throughout Arizona today.

Sometime in the mid- to late- 18th century, the Akimel O'otham (Pima) welcomed into the Gila River Valley a migrating tribe that called itself Pee Posh (Maricopa), The People, from the southern Colorado River area. The two tribes became allies and farmers in the Gila Basin, placing great value on developing the land and utilizing water as a means to provide for community needs. They were better able to thrive than many other Indian settlements in the Southwest thanks to their irrigation system and water supply. The early Pimas and Maricopas were healthy, humble, prosperous, generous, peaceful and well known for their hospitality, and that is their legacy today.

The two peaceful tribes offered friendship and shelter to settlers heading west. Their welcoming nature transformed what was believed to be hostile territory into a temporary sanctuary. Their beliefs still hold true today. The two tribes have different languages but share the same cultural values based on a sense of community – sharing resources, helping each other and their fellow man, and the law of the common good. They revere all forms of nature, including animals and birds, as a meaningful part of their lives, and they consider the surrounding Estrella and South Mountain ranges to be sacred.

The Pima are known for their basketry, using all natural materials (willow shoots, cattails and devil's claw) that must be carefully selected and collected at the proper time of the year. Baskets usually have a black center, with black and white designs. One of the most popular patterns is the Whirlwind. The Maricopa are known for their pottery made of red clay. They use natural dyes to depict geometrical designs.

THE COMMUNITY TODAY:

The primary goal of the Community, in its development programs, is to provide a stable economic base that enhances the quality of life for all Community members and ensures economic self-sufficiency for future generations. The vision: to be self-sustaining through diversity of development projects, with the help of the Great Spirit. With its ancient roots grounded in agriculture, the Community continues to grow its economy with 15,000 acres of community farms, harvesting cotton, wheat, millet, alfalfa, barley, melons, pistachios, olives, citrus and vegetables. Established in 1969, the Gila River Farms was one of the first economically successful tribal enterprises.

Today, the GRIC is diversifying beyond agriculture and gaming, into industrial, retail and recreational development, i.e. Whirlwind Golf Club and the Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass. The process began with the opening of the Gila River Casino in 1997. When the Community held the ground blessing for the Whirlwind Golf Club, the first stage of the resort development, they were greeted with a double rainbow. This rare display of nature dramatically symbolized to them that they were on the right journey. In addition, preserving its Indian culture through education, scholarships and intern programs is a major focus for the Community today.