



Pokégnek Bodéwadmik  
POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## FOUR WINDS CASINOS PARTNERS WITH UNITED STATES VETERANS SERVICE DOGS

*Team member volunteers will help raise a puppy to become a future service dog for a veteran*

NEW BUFFALO, Mich. – May 27, 2022 – The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi’s Four Winds® Casinos are pleased to announce that they have partnered with United States Veterans Service Dogs (USVSD) in the Puppy With A Purpose initiative that allows volunteers to raise a future service dog for a veteran. USVSD is dedicated to helping veterans return to a new normal by training and placing quality service dogs with veterans to mitigate the effects of mental and physical disabilities. During the program, Four Winds Casinos team members will serve as volunteer puppy raisers. Four Winds team members also participated in a fundraiser to help raise funds for USVSD. They were able to vote on names for the puppy, by contributing \$1 per vote, with no limitation on their number of votes. The name that received the most votes is Nēmosh (pronounced nuh-mo-sh), which means dog in the Pokagon Potawatomi language. In total \$2,700 was raised.

“Our mission to provide a new normal to veterans through the use of service dogs can only be accomplished through our amazing puppy raisers and we are thrilled that Four Winds Casinos team members have volunteered to be part of this very important process,” said Cody Bellanger, CEO, Director of Training and Client Services for USVSD. “During our dog’s puppy phase, we focus on positive association to new environments, basic obedience, and building foundational behaviors such as how to behave at home. The puppy will accompany their raisers regularly outside their homes. We provide resources to our puppy raisers on training and community of support to help them along the process. No prior experience is necessary to become a puppy raiser.”

“We are very proud to support United States Veterans Service Dogs and their important mission to improve the lives of our veterans,” said Frank Freedman, Chief Operating Officer of Four Winds Casinos. “Our team members who have volunteered to be puppy raisers are huge animal lovers, with each having fur-babies of their own. Participation in this program is a testament to the depth of caring and service-oriented spirit our team members are known for.”

Puppy raisers provide loving homes and teach their puppy good foundational behaviors. USVSD puppy raisers play such a vital role because they care for the puppies from around 8 weeks old until they are recalled to formal training between 14 and 18 months old. Puppy raisers are responsible for providing socialization opportunities to new and diverse environments. They will also teach basic obedience such as how to walk on a leash, how to interact with people, sit, down, stay, and public access manners.

After the dog is recalled to formal training, they train with professional service dog trainers for 3-6 months. Once they complete their training, they will be matched with their forever person. The puppy raiser will be

invited to the graduation ceremony where they will hand over their puppy's leash and see the impact they made on a veteran's life.

#### **About United States Veterans Service Dogs**

United States Veterans Service Dogs (USVSD) was founded in 2018 by Cody Bellanger. At the time, Cody was the acting CEO of Southern Diabetic Retrievers (SDR) and saw an avenue for the dogs being career changed from SDR and wanted them to still have a greater purpose. This purpose was found as working mobility and PTSD service dogs. In May of 2018, Cody was approached by the Dept. of Texas VFW to place VFW members with service dogs to help mitigate the disabilities they face within their everyday lives. From there, USVSD headed in a direction of greater purpose. USVSD started a breeding program and a puppy raising program to ensure the dogs coming into training were given the best possible start for becoming future service dogs. Our program is now training and placing dogs with veterans to help mitigate the effects of PTSD, mobility, and hearing complications from serving our country. More information on USVSD and details on how to donate can be found at [www.usveteransservicedogs.org](http://www.usveteransservicedogs.org).

#### **About The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians of Michigan and Indiana**

The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi's sovereignty was reaffirmed under legislation signed into law by President Clinton in September of 1994. The Pokagon Band is dedicated to providing community development initiatives such as housing, education, family services, medical care, and cultural preservation for its more than 5,900 citizens. The Pokagon Band's ten-county service area includes four counties in Southwestern Michigan and six in Northern Indiana. Its main administrative offices are located in Dowagiac, Mich., with a satellite office in South Bend, Ind. In 2007, it opened Four Winds Casino Resort in New Buffalo, Mich., followed by Four Winds Hartford in 2011, Four Winds Dowagiac in 2013 and Four Winds South Bend in January 2018. The Pokagon Band operates a variety of businesses via Mno-Bmadsen, its non-gaming investment enterprise. More information is available at [www.pokagonband-nsn.gov](http://www.pokagonband-nsn.gov), [www.fourwindscasino.com](http://www.fourwindscasino.com) and [www.mno-bmadsen.com](http://www.mno-bmadsen.com).

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