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W. Richard West Jr.

Founding Director of the National Museum of the American Indian

W. Richard West Jr., a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and a Peace Chief of the Southern Cheyenne, is founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. West has devoted his professional life and much of his personal life to working with American Indians on cultural, educational, legal and governmental issues.

Before becoming director of the National Museum of the American Indian, West practiced law at the Indian-owned Albuquerque, N.M., law firm of Gover, Stetson, Williams & West, P.C.; and before that, he was a partner in the Washington, D.C., office of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson. He served as general counsel and special counsel to numerous tribes and organizations. In that capacity, he represented clients before federal, state and tribal courts, various executive departments of the federal government and Congress.

West's current board affiliations and memberships include: Stanford University (2002-present); National Parks and Conservation Association (2002-present); Ford Foundation (1999-present); National Support Committee of the Native American Rights Fund (1990-present); and American Indian Resources Institute (1973-present).

He served as chair of the board for the American Association of Museums, the nation's only national membership organization representing all types of museums and museum professionals, from 1998-2000. From 1992-1995 and 1997-1998, he served as member-at-large of the association's board of directors and in 1995-1996 as vice chair of the board of directors. West currently is vice chair of the American Association of Museums/International Council of Museums, which represents the interests of American institutions in the international museum community.

As director of the National Museum of the American Indian, West is responsible for guiding the successful opening of the three facilities that comprise the National Museum of the American Indian. He oversaw the creation and completion of the George Gustav Heye Center, a museum exhibition facility, which opened in New York City on Oct. 30, 1994. He supervised the overall planning of the museum's Cultural Resources Center, which houses its vast 800,000-object collection,

and is located in Suitland, Md. West's philosophy and vision for the museum have been critical in guiding the architectural and program planning of the Mall museum, which opened on the National Mall in Washington on Sept. 21, 2004.

West also devotes considerable time and energy to the museum's fundraising efforts. As part of the legislation establishing the National Museum of the American Indian, it was mandated by Congress that one-third of the construction costs of the Mall museum be raised from nonfederal sources. To date, the museum has raised more than \$100 million in nonfederal funds for construction and the opening of the museum. West continues to oversee the fundraising campaign of the museum, which also provides for an endowment and ongoing educational and outreach programs.

Established in 1989, through an Act of Congress, the National Museum of the American Indian is an institution of living cultures dedicated to the life, languages, literature, history and arts of the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The museum includes the National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall, the George Gustav Heye Center, a permanent exhibition and education facility in New York City, and the Cultural Resources Center, a research and collections facility in Suitland, Md.

West, who grew up in Muskogee, Okla., was born in San Bernardino, Calif., on Jan. 6, 1943, the son of American Indian master artist, the late Walter Richard West Sr., and Maribelle McCrea West. He earned a bachelor's degree (major in American history) magna cum laude in 1965 and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Redlands in California. He also received a master's degree in American history from Harvard University in 1968. West graduated from the Stanford University School of Law with a doctorate of jurisprudence degree in 1971, where he also was the recipient of the Hilmer Oehlmann Jr. Prize for excellence in legal writing and served as an editor and note editor of the *Stanford Law Review*. He is married to the former Mary Beth Braden, who retired from the U.S. Department of State in 2005. They have two adult children, Amy and Ben.

West was succeeded by Kevin Gover (Pawnee/Comanche) as the director of the National Museum of the American Indian in December 2007.