



# Jurrius stands by a track record for himself, opportunity for tribes

*Jerry Reynolds Indian Country -- John Jurrius, president and CEO, Native American Resource Partners*

By Jerry Reynolds / Indian Country Today  
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## Part one

WASHINGTON - John P. Jurrius speaks of Leonard Burch, the late longtime chairman of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, as a visionary leader, and he made his reputation in Indian country by helping to translate Burch's vision into economic terms. Now, through a developing venture capital company, Native American Resource Partners, Jurrius hopes to spread the

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vision to other willing tribes in Indian country.

He has never wavered in one personal goal - to earn money. He tells tribes, as he repeated in a lengthy interview with Indian Country Today in mid-June, that if he earns \$1, they will earn \$10. But in fact, he added, the value he helped to create with the Northern Ute, on the Uintah-Ouray reservation in Utah, goes far beyond money in the bank: "We created assets that have appreciable value."

The tribe did not own an energy company when he went to work for it, he said. Now, through a subsidiary, it owns more than 125 oil wells with a commercial, as well as a lessee, interest in the profits. It owns more than 125 miles of gathering infrastructure - pipelines - that also feature a commercial as well as lessee interest in the profits. It owns a 25 percent stake in the largest gas processing plant in Utah. "We built that from the ground up," Jurrius said, adding, "That's all new value."

He did not mention - though the tribe, in 2006, directed attention to and distributed extensive articles from the Deseret (Utah) News and other publications to this effect - that the tribe was on the brink of bankruptcy, literally only a month or so from shutting down in 2001 when Jurrius came aboard, had a monetary worth of \$100 million in 2006 and distributed checks worth \$6.3 million to its members at the annual Northern Ute Fourth of July Powwow that year. (The asset figure didn't include hundreds of millions of dollars in water rights settlements.) It had added 600 new jobs to its overall payroll and elders enjoyed a flourishing retirement fund, reported the Utah newspaper in accounts the tribal administration itself took pride in.

In the process, businesses Jurrius had been engaged to run brought more than 150 resolutions before the council. "In all cases, they carried."

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But a new administration is in office now. Jurrius stepped aside from his duties for the tribe in August 2007, he said, denying that he ever resigned. And following his acceptance of an invitation to break bread on the reservation June 16 with about 160 Northern Ute allottees, he learned from newspapers and energy industry newsletters that he has been banned from the reservation.

"I have still never been provided a copy [of the resolution to ban him] by the tribe. ... The actions of this council do not represent my relationship with the Northern Ute membership at large. ... It was politically motivated."

Jurrius takes it in stride. He has worked with several different Southern Ute and Northern Ute administrations, and is well aware of politics. Given that his several titles over the years now include "venture capitalist," he also knows what every venture capitalist knows about the relationship between venture capital providers and their startup business partners.

"One hundred times out of 100 times," said one of them at a First Nations Development Institute Oweesta conference in the late 1990s, "there will be bumps in the road."

But what was the vision, then, initiated by Burch, implemented by the Southern Ute team and Jurrius, then transported by him to the Uintah-Ouray lands, where it has inspired alleged political motivations and wild language? (Jurrius has been accused of simply re-shuffling pre-existing assets of the tribe during his seven-year tenure, a theory discredited by the tribe's pride in the contradictory Deseret News series of 2006.)

A Jurrius associate has described that pan-tribal vision as the "classical happiness" of economic prosperity in Indian country. But it goes beyond that, as it goes beyond simply convincing tribal citizens they want to be capitalists, though Jurrius acknowledges the latter as part of the process in his work with the Southern Utes.

Burch's vision, and Jurrius' interview with ICT, begins with the simple fact that tribes collectively are the third-largest aggregator of natural resources in the United States, behind the federal government and the 50 states. And their resources are relatively undeveloped, Jurrius said.

"But the historic model, where they allow others to develop their lands, is just fundamentally wrong for a lot of reasons. And first and foremost ... I was asked to come in and restructure tribes. The first thing a restructure artist does, when he walks in and talks, you know, to any entity, when he takes a look at their assets, is: 'Okay, what kind of assets [do] they have?'

"In many cases, these tribes have tens of millions, hundreds of millions, or even in some cases billions of dollars of resources. But the problem is as a tribe, as long as that's the lessor estate, the mineral owner estate, it can't be severed without an act of Congress."

They can't capitalize their estate because trust land is inalienable, he explained, and generally can't be loaned against - put up as collateral for credit.

"However, as a lessee, if they lease to themselves, the lessee interest, under existing regulations, is a marketable security. And by creating that jump from lessor to lessee estate, now tribes have a total second form of currency. And so by creating that currency, then it allows the tribe to start seeking the capital it needs to participate in these, if you will, downstream commercial opportunities."

*(Continued in part two)*

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