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**Thomas W. Fredericks, Partner at Fredericks Peebles & Patterson LLP,  
Announces Retirement**

**Nov. 25, 2019** — Thomas W. Fredericks, partner at Fredericks Peebles & Patterson LLP, has announced his retirement. One of the nation's leading experts in the field of Native American law, Fredericks was formally honored October 22, 2019 at the National Congress of American Indians' 76th Annual Convention and Marketplace in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Fredericks said he was very moved by the NCAI honoring, and he expressed his deepest appreciation to NCAI and to the staff at Fredericks Peebles & Patterson for making it possible.

A member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota, Fredericks earned his Bachelor of Science degree at Minot State University in 1965. At age 23, he became director of the Standing Rock Reservation's Community Action Program, which focused on economic development work.

"I had 40 employees when I started," Fredericks remembered. "When I left three years later, I had 400 employees. It was a successful program, in that it allowed tribes to totally run the program that had the purpose of defeating poverty nationally.

"Tribes were allowed to make all the decisions with regard to the grant program and account for all of the funds," he continued. "In directing this program, I became aware of the claims attorneys' attitude towards tribal governments and their ability to govern. Consequently, I determined if Indian tribal governments were going to govern their people, there needed to be Indian attorneys who represented them in a manner that would allow them to exercise all of the privileges and immunities of Indian tribes—and exercise all of the jurisdictional authority to govern their people and create lasting homelands for tribal citizens."

At the time, Fredericks told Vine Deloria Jr. of his concerns with tribal representation, and Deloria invited him to come to Boulder, Colorado, and attend law school. Deloria, a law student at the University of Colorado, assisted Fredericks with the admission process.

Fredericks graduated from the University of Colorado School of Law in 1972. During his time there, he was instrumental in developing a Native American Law class, establishing a national Indian Law Students Association (and serving as its first treasurer), and bringing the Native American Rights Fund to Boulder.

"I was going to go back home, but NARF persuaded me to join the organization as an attorney," Fredericks remembered. "As a NARF attorney, I became deputy director and then director. One of the organization's main goals was to see Indians running Indian affairs, and tribal governments taking their rightful places and managing their own lands and resources. Before that, the Bureau of Indian Affairs ran everything, under paternalistic policies."

Fredericks got involved in policymaking during the Carter Administration, serving as chief legal officer for Indian Affairs in the Office of the Solicitor—he was the country’s first native Associate Solicitor—and later as the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, the primary policy official for Indian Affairs within the U.S. Department of the Interior. Then he decided to open a new chapter in his career.

“I looked at all these big law firms in Washington D.C., and they were all filled with paternalistic claims lawyers,” he said. “So, I started my own law firm in Colorado in 1979. It was a decision I made because I felt there should be Indian law firms and not token Indians in big law firms.”

In 2007, he merged that practice with his current firm, where he became an equity partner. Today, Fredericks Peebles & Patterson is one of the country’s only majority native-owned law firms, and it specializes in working with tribes and native-owned entities.

In his nearly 50-year career, Fredericks helped bring significant changes to Indian Country. He served as the president of first American Indian Bar Association. He authored the first solicitor’s opinion dealing with the issue of tribal gaming, formulated the Indian Water Settlement Policy relating to securing tribal reserved water rights, was instrumental in allocating central Arizona water to the central Arizona tribes, authored the first compact for the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, and was instrumental in getting the U.S. Congress to pass the Indian Mineral Development Act.

Fredericks successfully litigated hundreds of cases, always remaining dedicated to helping tribes maximize opportunities to develop their own resources, and negotiating on their behalf with the federal government concerning trust responsibilities. Along the way, he also mentored countless young attorneys, sharing his insights into how tribal, county, state and federal agencies operate; how the federal government views its relationships with Indian tribes; and the importance of supporting tribal governance over tribal citizens, to the exclusion of county and state governments, and making tribal homelands for Indian people.

“Self-determination is the policy now—establishing government-to-government relationships with the United States, whereby tribes are recognized as the primary government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a secondary entity,” Fredericks said. “I’ve spent my legal career making sure that Indian tribal governments were totally ingrained in the fabric of governance in the United States. I feel that Indian tribal governments are now fully recognized as the rightful governments for Indian country, and it’s time for them to effectively govern their citizens and magnificent homelands.”

A majority Native American-owned law firm, Fredericks Peebles & Patterson has offices in Sacramento, California; Louisville, Colorado; Rapid City, South Dakota; and Washington, DC. To learn more, visit [www.ndnlaw.com](http://www.ndnlaw.com).

*Fredericks Peebles & Patterson LLP is dedicated to the representation of American Indian tribes and Native American organizations throughout the United States. Legal services include a*

*wide spectrum of services related to Indian concerns in the areas of business transactions, litigation and governmental affairs.*

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