SCA EXCELLENCE IN CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AWARD
Patricia Ann Garcia

by Rebecca Allen, Michael Newland, and Shasta Gaughen

The Society for California Archaeology Excellence in Cultural Resource Management Award recognizes individuals or groups that demonstrate excellence and leadership in the field of cultural resource management. At the March 2020 annual meeting in Riverside, the SCA gave this award to Patricia Ann Garcia, the Tribal Historic Preservation Office for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

In 2005, the Agua Caliente Tribal Council established the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, and adopted a policy statement that states the Tribe is the steward of its own heritage resources within the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation, as well as resources within the Traditional Use Area that have ceremonial or traditional importance to the Tribe’s membership. In 2006, Patricia Garcia became the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer.

Native American Tribes know that preservation of heritage resources is an essential element in maintaining cultural values and cultural self-identity. As the THPO, Pattie has very effectively balanced managing cultural and tribal resources with protecting them. Under her leadership, her actions and her office have become a model for other tribal historic offices, cultural resource management firms, and governmental agencies.

The ability to express Tribal political, economic, physical, and spiritual importance associated with a particular place and particular resources is a learned skill. Indigenous places exist within, throughout, and outside of all modern constructs and changes. Knowledge held within each Tribal environment is integral to the thoughts and worldview of each Tribal member. To the European way of framing worldviews, these concepts may seem abstract, and yet to many Tribal members, they are only commonsense innate abilities and traditions. Being able to express these values in a way that agencies, cultural resource management firms, and individuals outside the Tribe can understand, while maintaining strict confidentiality, is akin to a balancing act on a tightrope with all archaeological and Tribal eyes watching. Pattie has managed this balancing act with unparalleled skill. She has provided experience, insight, and advice to THPOs and cultural heritage managers throughout California and the United States. The program she developed and manages for Agua Caliente continues to set the highest bar.

As THPO, a few of Pattie’s accomplishments are:

- providing better and consistent oversight of heritage resources;
- developing a comprehensive Historic Preservation Management Plan for Agua Caliente;
- establishing policies that assist government agencies with the importance of heritage information important to the Tribe;
- creating an Agua Caliente Cultural Register;
• developing a research design founded on Tribal perspective rather than a Western or colonial point of view;
• establishing an extensive system in GIS that documents sites and traditional areas of tribal significance; and
• serving on the Board of the Society for American Archaeology.

The role of the THPO is not just to manage cultural resources, but to help preserve properties and places of significance to the Tribe and to recognize lands filled with ancestral footprints. Agua Caliente’s Me-Yah-Whae magazine interviewed Pattie and stated that she saw being a THPO was not her job, but her calling. Her level of commitment expresses her excellence and makes her very deserving of this award.

CAPTION: Patricia Garcia (Courtesy of Me-Yah-Whae)