



## **Forest County Potawatomi Tribal History Fact Sheet**

The history of the Potawatomi tribe is rich in honor, tradition and emotion. Hundreds of years of self-sufficiency were followed by tremendous suffering and loss due to the forced removal from their lands. Spirituality, perseverance and love for all living things have enabled the Potawatomi people to survive, and in recent years, prosper.

Centuries ago, the Potawatomi people numbered more than 10,000 and occupied and controlled about 30 million acres in the Great Lakes area. In the 16th century, the Potawatomi migrated south and settled along the shores of Lake Michigan. The Potawatomi lived close to the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes. Because of this proximity, along with having similar languages and culture, the three tribes formed an alliance. The Potawatomi were given the task of keeping alive the Sacred Fire.

In the early 1800s, major portions of Potawatomi lands were ceded to the U.S. government. Following the Treaty of Chicago in 1833, most of the Potawatomi people were forcibly taken from tribal lands. Many perished en route to new lands in the west, and the march became known as "The Trail of Death." Some tribal people rebelled against this forced exodus and refused to leave the Great Lakes Region. The Forest County Potawatomi are descendants of these proud people. The tribe was formally organized into the Forest County Potawatomi Nation under a constitution and bylaws ratified by the tribe in 1937.

Today, the Forest County Potawatomi Community includes more than 1,200 enrolled members. About half of the tribe lives on the reservation, comprised of four communities in the southern section of Forest County. The reservation covers approximately 12,000 acres of forests and clear lakes and streams, most of which is held in Federal Trust Status.

A reverence for culture, tradition and the wisdom that comes with age is constant throughout Potawatomi history. Like all Native peoples, the Potawatomi attach tremendous importance to the moral worth and character of every person. In particular, the Potawatomi cherish a special, spiritual relationship with the environment and its cycle of life following the seasons of nature.