

Tribe vows to work with community

■ **Don Arnold says the Pomo Indians will be sensitive in pursuit of property for a casino in West Contra Costa**

By Tom Lochner
Times Staff Writer

Tribal chairman Don Arnold introduced himself to the North Richmond Municipal Advisory Council this week by pledging that his Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians would work closely with the community in its pursuit of a casino near the West Contra Costa landfill.

"We don't want to ruffle any feathers," Arnold told the council, which advises county leaders on North Richmond issues. "We don't want to go anyplace where we're not wanted.

"We come here as a friend and neighbor and hopefully as a businessperson from now on," Arnold said, promising that a casino proposal would undergo formal environmental review.

About four months ago, after a yearlong, countywide search, investor-developer

Noram bought an approximately 20-acre property on Parr Boulevard near Richmond Parkway, said Greg Zell, who assists the tribe in its dealings with federal, state and local officials. The investor also bought adjacent parcels totaling about 13 acres, said Zell, of Point Richmond-based Zell & Associates.

An agreement between the tribe and Noram envisions the Pomos acquiring the property under an arrangement that would give the investors a return, Zell said. The landless tribe currently has no money, Zell said.

The prospective casino property is in unincorporated North Richmond surrounded by the city of Richmond. The nearest homes are in North Richmond and Parchester Village, a Richmond neighborhood.

Earlier, the tribe and its representatives had pitched their idea to the Parchester Village Neighborhood Council, prompting complaints from some North Richmond

panelists that their community, which would host the casino, had been "disrespected" by not being wooed first.

"The property is in the county, not the city," said council member Henry Clark. "We need to be at the table."

Eddrick Osborne, president of Parchester's council, said he regretted if any egos had been hurt and assured the North Richmond council his group had simply listened to information but had not endorsed the idea.

Zell said the idea is in its infancy and that the Scotts Valley Band wants to work with North Richmond, Parchester and the broader community. He said it was too early to define the type and size casino the tribe would pursue.

County Supervisor John Gioia, whose district includes North Richmond, said he is not in favor of urban gambling but that local officials have little say in the matter. Given that reality, Gioia said,

local officials must use whatever leverage they have to negotiate benefits for local communities.

Before a casino could be built, the tribe needs to get the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs to put the land into trust then enter a gambling compact with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Gioia said.

Zell said that to qualify, the tribe must be landless and must have a historical presence in the county in which the land it seeks to put into trust is located.

Arnold said the tribe, which used to live on land in the Clear Lake area, was "terminated" and "de-recognized" by the federal government in 1958 and relocated to the Bay Area, including Contra Costa County.

Jesse Gonzalez, the tribe's treasurer and historian, said the tribe sued the federal government and was "redesignated" in 1992.

The Scotts Valley band numbers about 170 members today, Gonzalez said.