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BARAGA, Mich. — Fred Dakota, a pioneer of Native American gambling casinos, died Monday in the Upper Peninsula Michigan. He was 84.

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Dakota was a former leader of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and died Monday at his home in Baraga, according to [Reid Funeral Service](#) . A cause of death was not given.

Tribal offices [were closed](#) Friday, the day of Dakota's funeral, along with Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College. Ojibwa Casino locations in Baraga and Marquette were closed for much of the afternoon.

"It was an honor and a privilege to stand shoulder to shoulder with one of the greatest leaders in Indian Country," tribal President Warren "Chris" Swartz Jr. told [The Associated Press](#). "Fred impacted not only KBIC but many tribal communities with his leadership abilities."

According to his [obituary](#) , Dakota started a casino in his hometown of Zeba, Michigan, on New Year's Eve 1983, after receiving a gaming license. Operating with a single blackjack table, Dakota worked out of a two-stall garage, charging 70 cents for a shot of whiskey, the [AP](#) reported. His efforts led him to become known as the "Father of Indian Casino Gaming."

"We gave the government vast tracts of land in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota when we signed that treaty in 1854," Dakota told The New York Times in 1984. "And what did we get in return? We got the government to agree not to kill us. Well, now it's time we got something more. Gambling is going to make a lot of Indians rich."

The garage casino led to the construction of a larger casino, but decisions by federal courts shut it down, according to the [AP](#). By 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court used a California case to ease restrictions on gambling on tribal land. A federal law a year later allowed states to

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negotiate compacts with tribes.

“He was passionate. He was a courageous leader, and he was willing to (take) risks,” tribal CEO Brigitte LaPointe-Dunham told [Keweenaw Report](#). “That belief in tribal sovereignty and understanding the meaning of that was a core meaning of his leadership.”

A jury in 1997 convicted Dakota of accepting \$127,000 in bribes from a New Jersey slot machine dealer and evading taxes, the [AP](#) reported. He was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison.

Dakota was born in Zeba on June 10, 1937, according to his [obituary](#). He served six years in the Marines and became tribal chairman in 1970. He served as tribal council president from 1970 to 1982 and from 1990 to 1997.

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