



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 13--A group of Native American leaders, brought together through the National American Indian Council, today announced their plans to purchase the historic Willard Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue from its New York owners for \$7 million.

The building will become national headquarters for NAIC an umbrella organization representing 800,000 American Indians through 1,500 local and regional groups. Other Native American groups also will have offices there.

Helen Marie Klein, a spokeswoman for the group, said a portion of the Willard also will be devoted to exhibits and offices of the International Cultural and Trade Center

The facade of the Willard will be preserved in keeping with its status as a building of national historic significance.

"Ownership of the Willard means the First Americans can make a contribution to the preservation of an important part of the city's and nation's history," said Ms. Klein.

"Through it we will be able to extend the culture of our people and others around the world to the people who live in and visit Washington.

"And, as a practical matter, it will create a permanent home in the city where programs affecting American Indians can be created and administered," she said

The plans are to devote the first three floors to offices and meeting rooms and ICTC exhibits.

The upper seven floors will be renovated as hotel space. The purchasing group is discussing a management contract with a leading hotel chain.

Until the Willard ran into financial difficulty which forced its closing in mid-1968, it had a long and colorful history and a reputation for fine food and hospitality.

The original Willard, replaced by the present structure which was built starting in 1901, was home to many famous American and foreign guests.

President-elect Abraham Lincoln and his family stayed there, as did U.S. Grant and Calvin Coolidge. Charles Dickens visited at the Willard and Walt Whitman wrote a poem at the bar. Jenny Lind sang there, and the first Japanese Embassy was located in the hotel

Since its closing, the Willard has been the center of controversy and legal battles between commercial developers who planned to strip it of its facade, gut the interior, and create a modern office building, and civic groups determined to preserve the historic structure.

The International Cultural and Trade Center, to be the first non-Indian tenant, was formed in 1970 by

Washington Oriental art dealer Simon Kriger, who is its chairman. Ms. Klein serves as ICTC president.

The ICTC was conceived as a means of building bridges of understanding and mutual respect between the peoples of all continents through closer cultural and trade relationships.
