

Helping our veterans to access health, education



**CATHY ABRAMSON, DIRECTOR,
UNIT I**

Soon we will be celebrating at our Honor Our Veterans Powwow that will be held at Kinross Recreational Center! This past month, our board of directors passed a resolution to set up two scholarships to honor our veterans. One will be awarded to an honorably discharged veteran of the U.S. armed forces and another will be for the immediately family members of an honorably discharged

veteran of the U.S. armed forces. Please contact our Education Department to find out more information.

A big chi megwech to directors McKelvie, Malloy and McLeod for attending our Michigan Veterans Affairs meeting our tribe helped to sponsor in October. Dr. Mary Beth Skupien, from the VA headquarters in D.C. was there along with all the VA staff serving in Michigan.

I found the listening session very informative. We heard a lot of the frustrations our veterans go through when applying for services and assistance. What I learned is that the VA has improved in leaps in bounds for our newer veterans, while those veterans who have served in Vietnam and before are still frustrated with a confusing and slow moving VA system. Some have even stopped trying. Dr. Skupien encouraged those to come back and try again because of the vast improvements in the VA system. Because Director McKelvie has so much passion for our veterans and their rights, we are making

sure that he gets more involved in our VA conference calls and meetings.

Congratulations to Director Deb Pine who was appointed, by our tribal board, to our Head Start and Early Head Start Program Advisory Committee. She is perfect for the job as she is an active advocate for our tribal youth and the development of our Anishinaabe language. I now serve as the board of directors' liaison to the Head Start Policy Council and have done so for over 15 years. Head Start is one of my favorite programs and I would love to pass the torch on to Director Pine as I believe she would take good care of our children and their families and have their best interest in mind.

I just recently attended the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST) meeting in Oneida, Wisc. It was an excellent meeting. At this meeting, we passed bylaws for a newly developed regional health board. This has been about 10-15 years in the making, so this

was a historical event! Our area (the Bemidji area, made up of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa) was the only area that did not have a regional health board. Our area is also the lowest funded and has the highest health care disparities. Soooooo, with this newly formed board with representation from each state's tribes, we hope this will help us speak stronger by having a united voice. Chairperson Payment, Director McLeod, our Legislative Director Mike McCoy and our Health Director Bonnie Culfa attended this meeting. We had a great team!

I hope that our chairperson gets more involved at the national and state levels. This is where he SHINES! I know that Director McLeod agrees with me! I am very proud of him for that! Director McLeod is no slouch either. She is such an eloquent speaker and spoke for our waters. Our tribe needs to continue to put our people in positions that will help our tribe. I see Jennifer as being one of them.

No one person can do it alone. Relationship building is so important to get things done. That's why it's important for us to go to where a lot of these decision makers are. When we meet face to face with them, they get to know us and get to know our stories and issues. We are not just another document in the piles of papers on their desk! It makes us more real and they, in turn, actually deal with us.

We also had the opportunity to meet with Kevin Washburn, the newly appointed assistant secretary of the Interior. He informed us all how putting land into trust is not an easy process, as they also have to work with the counties, etc. We hope that he will be supportive in our efforts to put our Lansing property into trust. His words did give us encouragement, though!

I look forward to hearing from you and if you have any questions or comments, please contact me at cabramson@saulttribe.net or call me on my cell phone, (906) 322-3823.