

Tribes storm D.C., youth storm LSSU book fair



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Aaniin Anishnaabek! March seemed to be a month that focused on the future. After a long and brutal winter, warm weather is returning and the sap has finally begun to flow from the maple trees. We all know the sweet taste of maple syrup is in the near future! My home is on Sugar Island, and there is immense comfort in seeing that our old ways are still with us. Families gathering in the sugar bush, working hard, boiling sap and sharing lots of love, laughter and, of course, food!

At a tribal level, our board of directors meetings also focused on the future of our tribe. A great deal of our time is spent on budgets, budgets and more budgets! We work hard to find a way to maintain services, programs and businesses. We continue to wrestle with federal budget cuts, grants coming to an end, an economy that is very slow to recover from the recession, rising costs, unwise business decisions of the past.

pending lawsuits and debt. It is a grueling process, and it seems as though the last two years have been spent dealing with one crisis after another, but I remain hopeful as we are SLOWLY making headway.

The “crisis management” we have been experiencing may finally be giving way to “prioritizing” and making plans for our future. I will confess, it gets more than a little frustrating for me, I am a goal-setter, a plan-maker and an achiever. “Crisis management” is not a way I prefer to operate and it looks like the board of directors may be at the point where we are moving past that and looking ahead. To my way of thinking, that’s a HUGE step in the right direction! However, tribal politics may get completely in the way and derail the board from this path. It is, after all, an election year. Time will tell.

At the national level, I attended the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST) Impact Week in Washington, D.C. I have attended MAST meetings before, but I have to say this was the best one yet. MAST is an inter-tribal organization representing 33 federally recognized tribes, and four inter-tribal organizations in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana and Iowa. Tribal representatives gathered for the MAST general assembly to discuss issues that affect the future of Indian Country. We had roundtable discussions and presenters, which included Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn, Indian



Tribal leaders from the Midwest met with FEMA officials last month.

Health Service Director Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Specialist Richard Flores, Indian activist and Executive Director of Honor the Earth Winona LaDuke as well as members of Congress, Betty McCollum, Paul Gosar, Gwen Moore, Frank Pallone, Markwayne Mulin and Dan Kildee.

One of our afternoons was set aside for Capital Hill visits with members of Congress. We divided into 12 teams and “stormed the hill” as they say. I was teamed with Chairman Payment, and together we met with representatives from the offices of Congressman Keith Ellison, Congressmen Frank Pallone, Congressman Mark Pocan and Congresswoman Betty McCollum. We addressed:

- General opposition to hydraulic fracturing, pipelines and mining (focusing on protecting the Great Lakes and the Midwest water system).

- Call to the presidential administration to establish a Native

nations policy and staffing commitment (White House Council for Native Americans).

- Advanced appropriations for Indian Health Services (as is done for Veterans Health funding).

- Funding for economic development in Indian Country.

- Special diabetes funding (for at least one more year).

- And others issues as well.

Although we were meeting with congressional leaders who have been supporters of tribal issues (such as Congressman Al

Franken), it is important that we always take a moment to remind congressional staffers of the unique relationship between the federal government and Indian tribes. We remind them that tribes are specifically mentioned in the Constitution of the United States and that treaty obligations are not discretionary.

Another exciting part of our MAST meeting was a limited tour of FEMA (see photo). We were escorted through the main “Situation Room” and the operations room. The level of security and sophistication was amazing. Most impressive was the fact that there is a desk for National Tribal Affairs, positioned in a place of prominence. In the event of an emergency, Richard Flores is upfront and center supporting and representing the interests of Indian Country!

I saved my favorite subject about the future, for the conclusion of my article. Our children. It is more than just a cliché to say, “Our children are our future.”

See “McLeod,” page 25



Sault Tribe YEA administrator, Dee Eggert, in the forefront at the recent LSSU Book Fair where 500 area children went home with a free book.

Over 1,000 free books reach area children

— *From “McLeod,” page 24.*

It is pure and simple truth. This past month, an extraordinary event took place: “READ Sault Ste. Marie.” Local schools, libraries and community organizations held a reading event for students throughout the Sault area. The event was at, and hosted by, Lake Superior State University. Our school, JKL Bahweting Anishnaabe Grant School, under the leadership of Superintendent Theresa Kallstrom played a major role in bringing this event to fruition. In conjunction with Sault Tribe Education, Headstart and Early Headstart, the JKL Fiduciary Committee was able to provide books so that every child was able to take a book home (see photo). Tables were set up with information for parents on

ways they can support their children’s reading. From infants to high schoolers, there were exhibits, resources, and interactive breakout sessions targeted to their ages and interests. I was able to go back into “teacher mode” for a couple of hours. I was in a breakout room and had students help me tell the story of the baby porcupine. We laughed and sang and learned that everyone has a story to tell. But the greatest joy for me (besides hearing kids in the hallway still singing my little song) was seeing the excitement over the free books!

Over 500 students flocked to the huge display of more than a thousand books, all set out in grand fashion in the large exhibition room. Sometimes it was hard for them to pick out which one

they wanted, but every child went home with a free book! The glow on their faces was absolutely priceless. It was a heartwarming night, filled with community support because we all know that our children truly are our future!

On this bright note, I say “bamapii gwaabmin” (see you later). There are more good things to come! Please look forward to an online resource I will be sharing with you to help you learn the Ojibwe language. It is an extension of what I taught in high school, with the addition of SOUND! I’m working on it now, and hope to have it finished soon!

Miigwetch. Anishnaabe gagige (Anishnaabe for always),

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