

Causley discusses debt and payment structure



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This past month, we held our 23rd annual Gathering of the Eagles Powwow in Hessel. The time spent getting the grounds together, planning for the community, visiting and watching friends and family gather is the best feeling, knowing that our traditions and teaching have all come together. I can't explain how it makes me feel to have all the people involved and working toward a good weekend of ceremony and time spent together.

Chi miigwech to all the people who attended and helped make this year so special and a special "thank you" to our Housing Department and construction workers for getting all the structures ready. I would like to send a sincere chi miigwech to Joann Umbrassas for taking it upon herself to write a grant for a permanent structure/restroom for our grounds. The commitment and dedication by all is so appreciated by our community.

Also, our annual Youth Empowerment Powwow took place in Newberry. The community there had many young ones in regalia and dancing for the first time. Our YEA coordinators did an excellent job for them and all introduced themselves with their Ojibwa names. The pride was felt by everyone in attendance and I'm thankful to live in communities where we uphold

our traditions and are inclusive to all involved. Newberry will be getting a new replacement arbor for the grounds as well for the coming annual powwow in that area, the ninth annual Honoring the Waters on Sept. 5.

At the board level, we have had weekly updates and status reports from our temporary CEO and CFO as to the level of revenue we are generating based on the changes we have made. As reported last time, we remain in a good position for increased EBIDA. But, we now will face changes that are a little more difficult. As explained, once we made moves in the direction of better management and structure we discussed the need for at least \$12 million in renovations and upgrades to our existing facilities and machines. We are now at the time where we will have to make decisions on our debt and payment structure. We are moving toward refinancing the approximate debt of \$14.6 million for an addition three more years for a total of five years; this will lower the payments to \$245,000 per month, and the banks will waive the default charges that occurred on March 2013 through December 2014 and June 2015. (This default was due to not making our expected numbers, which has been a trend for at least the last three years.) This will also free up the immediate \$2.5 million needed for the new slot system and related hardware cost.

As you all know, my priority is to pay down the debt for the future, we have come so far and it's time to refinance for improvements so that our direction is better business and increased revenue. These decisions do not come lightly for me as extending debt hasn't been an option but, at this time, to waive covenant violation fees, secure new slots and upgrades as well as lower our expected payments so that we can sustain our levels of tribal support we give to our governmental ser-

vices, it's a decision that has to be considered.

I'm confident our direction is still a good one for the repayment of debt as we have followed that mind set this far. In 2005, we had \$20 million in debt; 2006, we incurred the \$14 million for St. Ignace; and, then 2007, we refinanced all debt plus \$35 million for Greentown, for a total refinance of \$70 million back then. Today, we only owe the \$14 million and just will extend out three more years thus far. We still have to secure capitol for renovation. The alternative is to pay the fees, reduce tribal support by about \$3 million and continue to operate with outdated hazardous slot systems. The new machines will increase business and steer towards a competitive market that we MUST try to sustain.

As of today, we had a presentation from each and every manager about new systems in place for advanced management training, shadow programs, financial analysis in their own casinos and pride and accountability from them as managers and team members prideful in positions with the new implementations of better knowledgeable management training. I'm supportive and will continue to expect business changes for success on our properties.

We will be working on our 2016 budgets this next month and, as always, I've requested that we do membership-based budgeting to see how many members benefit from dollars spent in each area. We have not been effective in completing this kind of budgeting. I'm very sorry that we can't look at priorities like that; it's frustrating to support programs where only a limited amount of dollars go to the member or service. As always, I will continue to bring this forward and request as a way of measuring what is priority and what services are most needed. I've been the hound on this for many

years and the resistance is frustrating, after inquiring about this in the last week I was told that it always gets some steam then dies out for one reason or the other. I will continue to try and move toward this. One item that weighs heavy is our lack of an education director or manager in our tribe. We have rural areas lacking the attention needed to educate our youth through services and aiding against dropouts and low grades. I've advocated for this at all discussions for budget and needs for priorities in our departments.

Two items worth bringing up are two resolutions the board passed regarding team members. In the past, it seemed there was a "barred from employment list" floating around. We have put that to rest and no such list exists nor does anyone, including the court, have authority to lifetime bar any tribal member from employment for the tribe.

The second resolution gives tribal members the opportunity to seek a set aside from a one-time offense. There are processes in place that will have to be followed, but members who have one crime and go five years without any other offense, can seek set aside from the Tribal Court (this is only offenses within our tribal court system; the state court has similar expungement criteria.) Please contact our court for the process as well as the criteria you must meet (there are certain crimes that are not able to be set aside, abuse of office and any crime that would require a registration as a sex offender are not included for a set aside).

I was supportive of both resolutions as many people have an offense that can mark them for a lifetime and people change, circumstances change and mistakes are made but shouldn't carry with us for a lifetime.

We have recently passed a budget modification to hire a dentist for the Manistique Tribal Health Center. We have a very

hard time retaining professionals for this position, and it's been difficult, but the new dentist should be starting soon. We also have had the loss of service in the DeTour area for labs and prescription pick up. This was due to circumstances out of our control and our health director has assured me we are seeking any other avenue available for the future plan for this area. We have spoken to a couple individuals (resident members in the area) about potential places but they didn't seem to work out. I will be inquiring monthly for a status for this service.

Last night, I had the very pleasant opportunity to attend the Naubinway elders' meeting. It was announced that this was the 10-year anniversary for them becoming recognized as their own group. I remember when just a few of them had been getting together to try and establish an official elderly group recognized in this community. With some criteria set, they were asked to meet and document for at least a year unrecognized to show the community commitment, then the board would discuss making them an official group of the tribe. With many hours of commitment and dedication, they did meet for a year, had meetings, gathered input, worked on bylaws and it was then that the board supported them in becoming an official group.

I will always have special ties to them as we were both brand new at the time and they have watched me grow as I have learned and appreciated them for true, sincere guidance in my role. Those are traditions and times I cherish in my representation.

Chi miigwech to all of you. As always, call me with input, concerns or to meet:

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