

McLeod grateful for outgoing board guidance



**JENNIFER MCLEOD,
DIRECTOR, UNIT I**

Aaniin Anishinaabek, as a result of our election, I have had to say “Baamaapii minwaa-gwaabimin (see you again later)” to three strong Anishinaabekwe: Debra Ann Pine, Deidre (DJ) Malloy and Joan Carr Anderson. It was my pleasure and honor to serve with them on our tribal board of directors. Over the past two years, working with them side by side, each woman has shown strength, perseverance, compassion and love as they fulfilled their oath of office to our people. Each, in her own way, has helped me grow in my role as a tribal leader. I am grateful for their guidance, love and friendship. Our tribe is blessed with strong women, and I am proud that these three strong women have dedicated their lives to the betterment of our people. I am filled with appreciation for each woman, as I know the sacrifices they made to help our tribe grow and be strong. In our Anishinaabe way, we never say “good-bye,” only that we will see each other again. Chi-Miigwech (Big thank you) Debra Ann, DJ and Joanie

for your service and dedication to our people, your presence will be missed.

I now say “biindigen” (welcome) to newly elected board members Kim Gravelle, DJ Hoffman and Rita Glyptis. Congratulations on your election, and I look forward to working with all of you for the betterment of our tribe. If there is anything I can do to assist you as you assume your new roles, please do not hesitate to ask. I wish you all (and our tribe) the greatest of success!

Last month, I spoke to you of the need to go back to our old ways in order to grow our leadership. I am pleased to announce that I have a young woman whom I saw leadership skills in, and have asked her to “get involved.” She is stepping up beautifully and I am providing the financial support needed for her to accomplish her goals. Perhaps next month, I can write a feature story about her but, for now, I will maintain confidentiality until I have her permission to do so. This is an exciting process and I am hopeful that she will enjoy her new role and grow into tribal leadership.

In June, I attended the National Congress of American Indians midyear conference: Claiming Our Rights and Strengthening Our Governance. My travel costs were sponsored by the JKL Anishnabe Grant School.

This conference had a significant educational component, which was my purpose for attending. Ms. Pam Agoyo, president, National Indian Education Association facilitated the ses-

sion. The agenda included:

- Consideration of resolutions
- Discussion and updates on Native children’s agenda, Common Core state standards and appropriations (Presenter: Ahniwake Rose, executive director, National Indian Education Association)
- Subcommittee issue updates
 - a. National Indian Education Association update (Presenter: Ahniwake Rose, executive director)
 - b. Tribal Education Departments National Assembly update (Presenter: Matthew Campbell, staff attorney, Native American Rights Fund)
 - c. American Indian Higher Education Consortium update (Presenter: Carrie Billy, president and CEO)
 - d. The White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education update (Presenter: William Mendoza, executive director)

It was an excellent conference, and an important one in terms of tribal sovereignty and the education of tribal children.

Recently, I have been working on an effort that I believe will yield day-to-day stability for our tribe. Our chairman has said that our tribe is in a “financial crisis,” and I agree. The next two years may be our most difficult yet. The deep national recession has hit Indian country and our tribe very hard. We need to adapt and make changes for the future.

Our tribe’s day-to-day stability has been dependent on a four-year election cycle. Every four years, we elect a chairperson. We have had some success with

this in the past, but it never made economic or business sense to put a politician in charge of areas commonly thought of in terms of the management of business, this includes the “business” of running our government.

Every four years, with the election of a chairperson, the operation of our tribe becomes vulnerable to the administrative, managerial and business capability of whoever proved themselves the best in the political arena (and got the largest number of votes). Sometimes it worked out, sometimes it didn’t. I believe it is time to increase our tribe’s sustainability and stability beyond a four-year cycle. I believe we need to separate the office of chairperson from the day-to-day operations. In fact, our tribal membership voted to do that very thing in a secretarial election in 2010!

I support our people’s voice in this matter and am bringing an updated resolution(s) to the board for action that supports the membership’s 2010 decision. My actions have resulted in some nasty politics, but pay no mind to the political rhetoric and bad mouthing that is occurring; it is to be expected, I suppose. However, separating the chairperson’s duties from the day-to-day operations of the tribe is what our people voted on. Our Constitution describes the duties of the chairperson’s office. The duties are a bit more than a mere “ceremonial figurehead” and I feel to say otherwise is an insult to our tribe, our Constitution and to those tribal members who worked hard to secure our federal recognition and the future of

our tribe. Every board member swore an oath of office to support the Constitution of our tribe. This resolution does just that. The resolution has undergone several changes and I am receiving input from board members and tribal members alike. Many minds will find the solution.

Our tribe NEEDS change. Our people have clearly stated that they WANT change. I intend to do my best to give it to them in the form of a stable business and government operation that is not subject to a four-year election cycle. Contrary to what some are asserting, this is not personal to our current chairperson. He is an excellent politician and does excellent work for us in the political arenas. However, by his own admission, his business ability is just “better than most...”

Our tribe is facing some very difficult economic challenges in the near future. We have identified enough funding surplus to support hiring a business expert for this year, and we NEED business expertise to lead us through the financial issues that we know are coming. We are a multimillion-dollar organization and we need high-level business solutions. It is merely a change that makes sense.

Miigwech for listening, and please continue to send good wishes and prayers for our elected leaders.

Anishinaabe gagged (Anishinaabe for always),
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