

# Seeing promise for the future, seeking improvements for today



LANA CAUSLEY, DIRECTOR,  
UNIT II

This past month has been a mix of updates to the board and gatherings for our community. We held our annual spring feast and pipe gathering in Hessel this last month to welcome spring and feed our ancestors. It was a day filled with good friends and family. We held our talking circle that had pipe carriers, veterans, grandmas, grandpas, youth and members from our Muukwa Giizick drum.

These gatherings not only keep our traditions to honor and feed our ancestors, but they keep us going in a good way too, everyone humbly shared their thoughts and feelings together and afterward we have a connection that everyone needs and craves in this place. I'm thankful for all the people who came and enjoyed our day. Had to share this part of my month as it was the highlight and we were very honored to have people travel from our other communities and share it with us.

Our youth groups came together to take part in a youth leadership conference this month. The conference gave them an opportunity to become familiar with all the departments in the tribe and to speak about their activities and goals for the future. I was offered tobacco to do the welcome speech and had an opportunity to send a message to the group one-on-one. I discussed "Taking pride in our tribe under any kind of pressure." The looks on the faces in this group was respectful and determined! It was inspiring, to say

the least. I have no doubt we will have leaders in our tribe, business owners and healthy young adults entering our workforce. After the first day of the gathering, the group prepared and made a presentation to our board, specifically discussing all the activities they have been involved in, in each unit. I cannot tell you how impressed and grateful I was with the activities and leadership these youth demonstrated. A few activities many of us may not know take place: doing presentations in local schools for anti-bullying, suicide prevention, coping with peer pressure, school anti-smoking education campaigns, hosted elders dinners, prepared fundraisers for foster families and people in need, grown gardens, held clean up activities for numerous community service projects, took part in offered cultural activities and many are part of youth drum groups who carry on our traditions.

During the presentation to the board, the coordinators were in attendance but they didn't have to say a word (which means they sure are doing their part steering them to lead) every single young adult who was present had a role to speak and offer part of their activities and presentation. They glowed with pride and took every single second seriously as they demonstrated professionalism and no-nonsense. They talked about future plans and, I have to say, we have something to look forward to, we all heard future leaders, we have them! Proud, determined, respectful kids (I did not see one cell phone).

I know I've been writing a lot of positive stuff, but we do have so many of our people counting on us for advancement and success that times like this humbles me! Chi miigwetch to the coordinators and YEA staff who assisted and continue to steer these young adults, you should be very proud of your work.

To close out the day, we had lunch with them and had an opportunity to visit one-on-one. I happened to be sitting with a group who said, "We have a

special presentation for you all," two young girls, stood up, stood straight and starting singing the national anthem to the entire group, no hesitation, no reluctance, no shame, just completely comfortable and confident. Heather Gregg and Tamantha Sylvester, the song was amazing. I guess what impressed me so much was the kudos and encouragement all of them showed for each other, heck I want to join the youth group! Anyway, I had to share that because it truly was an inspiration for our people.

Following are the names of these hard working staff in our units and, if you want your child involved, please contact them through our Education Department and again, miigwetch to them and our future leaders. Unit I, Jill Lawson in Sault Ste. Marie; Unit I and II, Dawn Griffin, Kinross and Rudyard; Unit II, Lisa Burnside and Robin Latour, Hessel; Unit III, Sue St. Onge and Francie Wyers, St. Ignace; Unit IV, Patty Teeples and Janet Krueger, Manistique; Unit IV, Karen Corbett, Escanaba; Unit V, John Pieper and Kathy Pieper, Munising, along with Dee Eggert in Sault Ste. Marie and Kelly Contantino in Escanaba.

On to business of the month, we have completed our tribal action survey and are in discussions about how to proceed with the mailing to members. As you know, we held community forums and focus groups for input but we need to hear from the rural areas and all members on the issues of drugs and suicide issues from our communities. Once you receive this survey, please fill it out and send it back as this will steer our tribal-wide plans for treatment, prevention and education. We are adamant about this survey going to all members and with your help we can be better informed of the needs in each individual area. National news this week was that Michigan is sixth in the entire nation for meth arrests, with this and other statistics our tribal action plan and our youth education programs are priority for our young people.

We continue to hold our bi-weekly gaming authority meetings to discuss financial progress in our five casinos and plans for the concerns from our survey project this past year to increase morale, customer service and better business practices from management in our casinos. We have completed the goal of creating a "Kewadin improvement teams," which took the place of quality control groups. These teams are made up of front line team members who want to see changes in the casino and are dedicated to making a difference in the work place. I encourage all team members to find out who is on the group from your casino and talk to them, they will have an opportunity to discuss creating a better workplace and the minutes from the meetings will be supplied to us along with plans and remedies to accomplish items brought forward. I cannot and do not manage the casinos, this is a long-time debate within our structure. We have managers in place who are responsible and must be accountable for the business and, hopefully, this will be a tool to assist them and make our workplace better for each team at every casino I expect this is a step that will encourage team members to be involved with our business on a more active level and, if it doesn't work, we need to hear that too. As I said, I don't manage the casinos so let me know, I'll be watching closely on this project. If we need to make changes or it falters I will be advocating additional ways to assist in better business practices.

Our Lansing project is still steady and on target, we had been told it would take time and expect all the outcomes this far, again we are steady and will continue to fight for the land in trust and make sure all our plans are followed through on so that when it happens we are prepared for success. Going through the steps is necessary as due diligence and making sure we are protected and have a solid successful plan is the only option for the endeavor.

Our financials picture is

on target for paying down our debt. As far as I and most of my colleagues on the board are concerned, our priority is paying down this debt as planned and we are continuing to hold that line. It's very hard when we have so many services that need more funding and team members who need an increase, but there is a plan. If we continue on the path, we will have an additional amount each year to prioritize (\$8 million).

I'm absolutely making no promises, but have to inform you that the steps we take to increase revenue and frugal spending now will assist us in our goals when the debt is paid. I get tired of hearing myself say this too but we are almost there. I do not spend what we do not have. Empty promises are easy, but the planning for the future is hard. I have again asked that we have a financial three-year plan presented to us based on our income, debt payment and priorities for needed service. We have capable executive staff who can take input from all departments on the needs and demands. I assure you that a demand is raises for our workforce. We have to identify a clear plan and that's hard with the politics and nonsense that goes on sometimes. I will report this plan once presented. My next step on this will be a resolution to identify a timeline and specific individuals to accomplish this.

In closing, I hope I'm on the right track, at this time in our tribe we hear many promises and talk about increasing services, raises and bonuses. All those are truly needed but, in the end, its how we get there with limited resources, debt to pay and fighting an uphill battle with internal politics and national and state struggles everyday. I work very hard to constantly look for ways to balance that and take pride in our tribe and the people.

Please contact me anytime with your thoughts and concerns. See you at our meetings. Baamaapii Lana Causley, (906) 484-2954 or 322-3818, lcausley@saulttribe.net.