

Sorenson - rumors and leadership do not mix



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During a special meeting of

the board on Aug. 11, the board voted to form an executive committee made up of the chairperson, secretary, treasurer, tribal CFO, HR director and the executive director. The committee will need to bring back a transition plan to the full board within 14 days of what will happen when the COO is done on Oct. 1. Our committee first met on Aug. 22 and reported to the board on our initial plan. We have met a couple of times since.

During this process, the casino managers are tasked with bringing a plan forward to turn their individual casinos around. The entire board will hear these plans on Sept. 19. There have been

team members placed as interim in vacant positions until we can fill these positions.

Currently the tribe takes \$17 million a year from the casinos for governmental services. The casino revenues are declining and down by about \$1 million this year. I believe the casinos cannot afford to continue to give the government \$17 million for 2015. The casinos need capital improvements such as software upgrades, new slot machines, new fixtures, furniture, etc. Without needed improvements, we will continue to fail. People continue to complain about the appearance of the casinos, but need to realize

if we continue to take from them and not let them keep money for capital improvements, then we are responsible for failing them in that respect. This will not be an easy feat since many members rely on our governmental services. It makes more sense to cut back now to rejuvenate the casinos rather than when they are too far gone and we have a fraction of the \$17 million to provide for services.

There have been rumors circulating that we are going to be closing the Manistique and Hessel casinos. I do not know where this information is coming from, the board has not discussed closing

any of our businesses down. The most upsetting rumor I heard was put on Facebook this weekend by our "leader," Mr. Payment. He posted on his page that the board created a CEO position which was once a position that Bernard held and that six or seven board members would hire him back at over \$800,000. I am a member of the Executive Committee and this has never been discussed by us, or the full board. Why would anybody who is supposed to be a leader of this tribe create lies and start rumors? Personally, I would rather have someone with business experience lead the tribe

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rather than someone who begs the U.S. government for money. I can honestly say, what new businesses have been started since 2004? I do not know why this behavior surprises me, but who purposely starts rumors and tells lies and expects people to respect them? I would think that other tribes and national leaders are looking at this type of behavior and wondering what is wrong with this person.

Unfortunately, when the person in the highest position of the tribe puts lies and attacks on Facebook, it is hard to tell team members not to post certain things on Facebook. We desperately need a social media policy and we do have a committee working on one but it needs to be the number one policy review right now. The chairperson likes to use the term free speech. To me, it is common sense that you think twice about what you post for the world to see, especially when it pertains to your job or posting on the clock. In the real world, employees have policies to follow when it pertains to social media posting and activity. If you were an employer and you saw some inappropriate postings made by a candidate you were interviewing, would that influence your decision?

I have been hearing that man-

agers are saying that the board is forcing them to recycle team members. The board has established a tribal preference in hiring policy. This policy does not force anyone to be hired. This also does not guarantee someone will keep a job either. It is up to supervisors to do their job and document when they hold team members accountable. If there is no documentation there, it didn't happen. I used to hear managers complain, "Why bother writing someone up, because it will just get overturned." My answer was and still is, "It is your job to make people accountable, and if someone else overturns it, at least you are doing your job." I am hoping that our casinos start going in a positive direction because it literally breaks my heart to see unhappy team members.

The St. Ignace Midjim has some serious parking lot issues and needs to have the tanks replaced. We have a grant that will help cover the cost of the parking lot. Before moving forward with this, we discussed the possibility of building a new store that would be located at the driveway to the new casino. We have received estimates on the costs of fixing the current store or building a new store. The cost to fix the current store will be about \$660,000 and a new store at a

better location would be about \$1.1 million. The current store had problems last winter when the water froze and the city could not run water from another house because no one was on that side of the road. Because of the foundation, the water could not be thawed. The store went without water for weeks. The estimate will not include fixing neither this problem nor the problem of it being located in the bottom of a bowl.

The idea of a new store was introduced because many customers leaving the casino turn left and head into St. Ignace for gas, they would probably stop if a store was at the entrance/exit of the casino. The board will be voting on either fixing the current building or building a new one. I look at it like I have a car that is 10 years old and needs about \$2,500 in work. Do I put that into the old car that will continue to nickel and dime me, or put that \$2,500 into a new car that will last me 10 more years? The current building is 22 years old. Some worry that the store was built to serve the residents on the reservations. The store would only be about 200 yards from the old store. Another concern is what to do with a vacant building. My idea would be for housing to buy it and safely take care of

the underground tanks and build more houses.

The board has been meeting for the past 2 weeks on the 2015 budgets. The board ended up calling special meetings for the end of August so we could at least start the review process. It is unfortunate that we are not just presented a working document. Instead, we are given bits and pieces. I am dumbfounded when areas are requesting more tribal support than they had for 2014. We are not making more money. Like I said above, the government needs to take less from the casinos, like maybe \$15 million instead of \$17 million. It is time for the tribe to put the money into the programs that benefit the most members and no duplicated services. We will be continuing to meet throughout the month of September to pass a budget.

I have concerns with the amount of meetings that get changed or canceled so the chairperson can serve on committees at the federal level. I understand it is important for us to participate at this level, but when you are gone several days each month but you also have authority over the day to day and things cannot get done because of these other committees, than it is time to decide what is best for the tribe. I believe the solution is the chair-

person participates at the federal level and we continue business as usual back home. It is called team work and more work gets done this way. Last year, the chairman wanted a \$50,000 travel budget and the board approved a \$10,000 budget, which was supposedly exhausted after the first quarter. The chairman is requesting more travel money in 2015. Some of his travel is covered by the committees he is appointed to, but sometimes not all the expenses are covered because they are based on flights and not driving or train costs.

Summer went by so fast. I was only able to attend the Hessel and St. Ignace powwows on Sundays. The committees do a great job organizing these.

I would like to congratulate the following scholarship recipients: Stefan Saffian, the Donald "Duck" Andress scholarship; Lindsay Robinson, Rob Robinson and Taylor Jo Becker for all receiving the Noah Leask scholarship. Good luck this year!

The next St. Ignace board meeting will be Oct. 21. Monthly unit meetings are on the third Mondays of the month at 6 p.m. at the former McCann School.

Enjoy the beautiful fall weather and feel free to contact me at bsorenson@saulttribe.net, office 643-2123 or cell 430-0536.