

Keeping balance, picking battles and remaining constant



LANA CAUSLEY, DIRECTOR,
UNIT II

Aanii, its a new year and new moon for our people. Many items have been addressed this past year and I would like to touch on a few important ones.

We created our Tribal Action Plan group and many staff and community members completed the process of holding community forums and focus groups throughout our areas.

The information has been gathered and an update has just arrived from our staff that we will be working on the final action plan to implement. Miigwech to all of the members and staff who made this a completed goal to go out for input and involvement.

We purchased the access fishing site in Epoufette. Many challenges came with that, but I'm very happy to report our staff worked diligently to secure over \$500,000 to upgrade and prepare that property for fishermen. We had some disheartening set backs at first, but this is moving forward and is on track for 2014.

We're gathering information and requested that our Unit II area and other outlying areas provide access to clinic hours, prescription pick up and lab work be done in our outlying areas again. This was completed in the last quarter of the year and I'm thankful to the health staff and board members that supported this for our outlying memberships needs.

We created a committee of members and staff to go over our draft constitution, in the end it does not seem that all can agree on the document in its entirety.

Therefore, we have a direction and commitment from most of

the board that we will focus on amendments for 2014. I stated at the start of this project that this was the most productive way to go and it seems that we can all set priorities on amendments we need and would like to see.

I'm committed to making changes one by one, so we are not confused and each and every change has an opportunity for your input and direction.

This past year we reestablished our Anishinaabe Cultural Committee. I've spoken about it in past reports. We have met and discussed with our department and community members the needs our people have to access for cultural teachings, goals for healing our communities and a vision for the future.

It's been a very humbling position to be part of this time and I'm excited to be part of the department and community's thoughts.

The department and tribe have implemented some major changes that will educate our ways to new team members and an ongoing commitment to introduce all our new staff as to our tribe's history and some of our ways. Sometimes, I spoke to people and they didn't even know they worked for a tribe! It's unique and a government of its own, I'm very happy that we have an orientation process put in place to educate about our history and our ways.

We have also been notified that we have a continuous problem with seeking out fluent speakers to teach our Ojibwa language, I'm proud to say that our Cultural Department has plans for the new year to seek out speakers in a different kind of way — we will seek speakers who have expertise for each community to go out and introduce our language.

We've had extreme difficulty in hiring one fluent speaker for the department so they have come up with a different plan to assist in our keeping of the language alive. It's good and I'm excited to see this goal for our tribe.

All of our committee meetings are open to all members and encouraged to attend. We have requested a spot on our official website to advertise the times and places for each meeting as after winter we will again be traveling

to all areas. We are still in need of committee members so please, if you are interested, contact Tara Benoit or Clarence Hudak for information. (906) 635-6050.

Sequestration discussions where very painful and affected our 2014 budgets. We met many hours to focus on keeping services and reducing where it would least affect us. Any change is hard and keeping up with the increase in need versus the reduction of funding is not an easy task. It will be an ongoing process and priority for me will be to keep our most needed services intact. This year will bring new challenges through the budget process but keeping debt down and services will be the goal for me.

We completed our team member surveys, I'm hoping that our team members are seeing some significant and positive changes from this, as I stated in my last reports, we have goals and timelines for changes to be made from management. Contact me and other board if you are not seeing noticeable changes, this was a serious endeavor for our board and team members so we need to keep hearing from you. We have many areas to improve, it's an ongoing process and lots of items to address. I'm committed to this, so be vocal and always discuss with your chain of command the areas you want to see changed. I will be asking for this information throughout the year and an update on any suggestions made.

The Lansing project has been interesting and is on track as expected. We had good news this past month that we're now able to move forward in placing the land in trust. This will be a lengthy process and the court and state will stall us as we expect. We have a good legal argument and it's ongoing as stated in many past reports. We still have much work to do but as long as we remain constant, consistent and protect ourselves at every turn, we can see the goal. I'm still as skeptical as in the beginning but pursuing for diversity and additional revenue for our tribe. Very watchful!

We completed our analysis on our restaurants and marketing department, we again made painful reduction and inside a recent

update from management our numbers improved to the tune of about \$250,000 in savings and increase combined.

We also made reductions in our overall casino operations at the end of the year. We eliminated positions and departments within the casinos. This again was an extremely hard decision as a few team members had many years in our operations. There are so many rumors and ugly words being said about the recommendations and decisions made but, in the end, we have significant concerns about our lack of revenue in our casinos and recommendations came with a suggested savings of \$500,000.

Changes are hard and we recently had to pay a \$25,000 penalty as well as place \$2 million on our loan due to NOT making our projections from the businesses. These are serious concerns and when owning a business many factors and choices have to be made. The outcome does not fall on one person's shoulders, our economy, lack of reductions in past and stagnant operations are all a firestorm. I hated making the reductions but sitting on a Titanic is not healthy and is not an option for me, as my responsibility for all people of our tribe has to be my main concern. Any business needs changes, cost savings and actions to increase revenue. I made the hard decisions and will continue, as I always have, to secure our future. I want to acknowledge and thank the dedicated team members who were affected; no words can ease what you feel, as I have heard from you I appreciate your dedicated work for our tribe. I hope that you can understand the difficult times and choices that have to be made.

One last comment about our financial health is the obligations we agreed to and MUST abide by, is our responsibility toward debt. Our payments and reductions toward that for 2013 is a total of \$163,000 on our loan for Manistique and Munising tribal centers and \$9 million toward the Gaming Authority debt.

With all the politics and mis-truths that are thrown around, it's sometimes not an easy task but keeping balance, picking battles and remaining constant on the best interest for the future is my prior-

ity. Factual communication is the key for leadership, it's easy to sit back and vote 'NO' on extremely hard decisions but leading our way to savings and financial sustainability comes with very tough choices.

Our powwows throughout the summer season were amazing. Miigwech to all the committees that made them all possible in the different communities. It's hard work and a thankless job most of the time, but you made memories and a difference to us that is one of our truest connections. Miigwech!

In the most recent past was the organizing and success of our children's Christmas parties, it was such a good time for our children. Miigwech to the volunteers in Newberry, Hessel, DeTour and Engadine. The ladies (grandmas) put so many hours into this and the smiling faces at our parties proved it made a difference in their holiday.

In closing, I would like to say miigwech to all our community members and staff who assist in our tribe's successes throughout the year. We have many more irons in the fire and everyday struggling within our tribe and at the national level but all we know is to push on and that's what we must do. So many of you call and give advice and input that I appreciate and respect. I have so many different irons in the fire with individual staffing concerns, proposals that individual members would like to see, good, positive thoughts and ideas on our future that I will work toward throughout this coming year. There are many more board items I could discuss but wanted to give you a brief summary of those on the agenda throughout this past year. With all the changes, reductions and plans for our future we must keep in mind that it's a daily struggle in Indian County, all the Indian nations face our same problems and hurdles, we just have to keep honest, keep focused, keep working toward good things for the people, keep our traditions and push on.

As always, if you want to meet or talk with me, contact me at lcausley@saulttribe.net, (906) 484-2954 or 322-3818.

Baamaapii,
Lana Causley