

Sorenson - politics are taking a front row seat



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DIRECTOR, UNIT III**

As I stated in my May unit report that the St. Ignace Midjim issue was put on the May 5 agenda conveniently after I had asked my elders to support the feasibility study. During the workshop that day, I had asked who put it on the agenda and was told the chairman told budgets to place it on the agenda for a vote. The chairman claims there were not enough votes to do otherwise and staff needed to move forward since it was construction season. During the meeting the resolution to put a Band-Aid on the Midjim for \$266,522 was motioned by Director Chase (Manistique) and seconded by Director Morrow (Manistique). Normally when a resolution pertains to a particular unit the representatives from that unit move things forward. The vote ended in a tie with the chair breaking the tie to put the Band-Aid on. It is truly sad when politics take over common sense. The tanks were put in in 1991 and have a 30-year life expectancy. So, in a few years we will dig up all the concrete to replace them.

The chair decided to show up

at the Unit III elder's meeting that same week after a year-long hiatus and told our elders that he had gotten papers that morning from the general manager of the Midjim that it would take 35 years to pay off a new building. Now why would he get those numbers three days after the vote and the number we were given was 14 years. The next thing he said was that if there was going to be a Midjim built it should go to Manistique. Now people can see the true colors. I have never been opposed to a Midjim in Manistique or any other area but, like I said, when you have a business that is currently making money and needs a lot of improvements and possibly a new location, what is the priority? Politics!

During the May 5 meeting there were nine resolutions removed off the agenda. Once again politics is taking a front row seat. These items should not be placed on the agenda if there is no intent on voting on them. The membership continue to drive to these meetings and items are removed, they are limited to five minutes to address the board and board members are often told we are not going to respond during this time. If questions can be answered right then and there, they should be. Sometimes the membership issues start at 4 p.m., sometimes 5 p.m. It is no wonder the membership is frustrated.

On May 15 there was a clean-up day at the Wequayoc cemetery. There were about 15 members of Unit III who attended. The cemetery was in decent shape to begin with and just needed a little raking and cleaning up rocks. The rain began about 1.5 hours into the clean-up, but luckily we were just about done. Thank you to all those who helped! Russell Rickley has been approved as the temporary



Director Sorenson and Unit III scholarship winner Madysin Lee

volunteer sexton and will be seeking training in June.

The board voted to raise the minimum wage to match the state minimum wage of \$8.15 per hour effective June 19 at the May 19 meeting in Naubinway.

There was a vote for posting the CEO position at the May 5 meeting. The resolution did not pass. I do not think it is helping our business to continue to place this on the agenda. Team members wonder each time what is going on and what will happen if this passes? They continually ask if Fred Buro is being fired. This is not good for stability and morale. Changes have begun to take place mainly in our marketing areas and we will soon see how the numbers play out in the next few months. I know some people are not happy that things are not happening faster. I have some of those same thoughts, but I think that one person cannot change everything in a few months. He first needed to stop the financial bleeding, help current management with budgets, reorganize our marketing strategies and is trying to secure funding for many needed capital improvements.

I cannot believe how things have changed in the last 13 years. When I began working for the Human

Resource Department in 2002, they cared about our team members. If team members had any concerns, questions or issues, they could go to human resources and they would listen, answer questions and guide them. Thirteen years later team members have NOBODY to talk to!

Sometimes team members are having a bad day and just want to vent. Some days they are subjected to vindictive supervisors and need support or guidance. Sorry we can't help you. We can only give you the policy and you figure it out. We are not counselors. Well if this is the direction that human resources is going, then we need to hire advocates for our team members. Do people really believe managers and supervisors do not retaliate, harass or are vindictive to their subordinates? So I guess we are here to just protect certain classes of team members.

We have had team members who have dedicated their careers to the tribe to only be cut because their job was moved into a grant or because of restructuring. These same team members cannot even get a letter of recommendation even though their job was not cut for work performance reasons. We are doing absolutely nothing to train our team members to grow within the organization. We are not grooming people to take over when others retire or leave the company. We need a plan for tomorrow, for the future. Our workforce used to be happy and liked coming to work, now it is just a job and many are looking for new opportunities.

Until the board actually sits down and comes up with a strategic plan for the tribe and decides whether or not to treat our enterprises and government side differently, we will continue to spin our

wheels. I would have to believe the reason we opened up our businesses and casinos was for the intent of increased services and benefits to our membership. With that in mind, are we making decisions that allow our businesses to prosper? Are we taking every possible penny to provide current services with no room for capital improvements or expansions? Can we continue to take \$17 million from the casino side to fund the government side when the casino revenue is declining? Nobody wants to take money from services but where do we draw the line? Do we take less from the casinos now to prevent a larger decrease in service funding later? If we do not take care of our businesses how long will they be able to take care of us? We need to quit thinking about today and plan for tomorrow.

Whenever we talk about raises some think it needs to be the same across the board. All employees get an increase or no one does. It doesn't make sense to me if certain areas of the tribe can afford to give their team members raises then they should be able to. Many grants can absorb these costs. If the casinos start increasing their revenues, as well as our other businesses, then they should be able to provide raises. We have different benefit packages for government, casino and enterprise, so why not wage increases too?

I would like to congratulate Madysin Lee on receiving my Unit III Scholarship this year. Madysin has a 3.661 GPA and is attending Aquinas College in August to pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing through Detroit Mercy. Madysin has worked for the past few years as a student worker through the WIA program at the St. Ignace Health Center. Good Luck, Mady!