

Sorenson gives monthly review from Unit III



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DIRECTOR, UNIT III**

On June 3, we had our meeting and workshop in St. Ignace. One item of discussion was the tribe's employee emergency fund program. This program runs through our ACFS division and is funded from found monies in the casino. In past years, thousands of dollars were found on the floor and, with

many slot machines now coinless, less money is found. We also have a better surveillance system that can track down the customer who lost the money, sometimes before they leave the building.

The program is in danger of running out of funds, so we may have to look at fundraisers or other alternatives to keep it going. We discussed our current comp system for players and the need to make changes to stay competitive. We have a new system that will soon allow customers to see their comps on the machines and be able to use them at the point of sale instead of having to visit the player's club desk.

We discussed Head Start/Early Head Start's 2014 budget. There will be staff laid off for one-month intervals to save money in both programs. As unfortunate as this is, some of the staff are happy to have a break.

We discussed the 2012 election

results. The Election Committee only retains records for 90 days following an election. We talked about the need to speed up the process of filling vacancies on the board or the chair's seat, if such vacancies occur. We will be holding a meeting with the Election Committee to discuss future changes for the 2014 election cycle.

On June 4, I went to the United Way annual awards breakfast sponsored by the casino. I have belonged to our Workplace Campaign Committee for the past four years or so since becoming a team member. We start meeting for the year in June to plan our fundraising booth at the Sault sidewalk sales in July. We have a bake sale, face painting and children's games. Last fall, we had a movie day at the casino, selling popcorn and beverages. The Sault Tribe won the 2012 Award of Excellence for total contributions

of \$14,314.24 by 123 employees contributing. We won an award for special events with the movie day raising \$165.75. The committee is made up of people from the Sault and St. Ignace area, meeting during the lunch hour to discuss our campaign. Our goal this year is to beat Cloverland Electric Co.

On June 7, we had our TAP meeting. We are almost done with our community forums and focus groups. We are focusing on a coming survey going out to households. We ask that people please take the time to fill them out so we can try to get a better handle on drug abuse prevention and treatment in our communities. There is a newly formed group in the Sault called Families Against Narcotics (FAN) working to have drug awareness nights and advocating in drug courts.

On June 9, I went to Doris LaDuke's benefit dinner and auction. They had a great turn

out and actually ran out of food. Doris is a long-time team member of the Lakefront Hotel and is greatly missed there. She is getting better by the day and we hope to see her back soon.

On June 10, I was in the Sault casino doing team member surveys from 6:30-9:45 a.m., which was cut short due to a special meeting being called. During the 10 a.m. special meeting, we discussed efficiencies and savings. There is a lot of discussion on the team members that are over the max on the pay scale. There are many variables and it is not an easy fix. We have decided to review each team member's employee file to look at their individual raises and changes in position and compare it to the raise structure the board passed in that year. There are many team members who are just over the maximum rate because of annual

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raises. In my opinion, that is not their fault and plays into longevity. If team members were just given raises for who they were and not justified, then I have a problem. We need to replace 533 computers to be able to utilize the new software upgrades. We discussed our pay for performance program for our medical staff. We would like a presentation or report proving that this program has really helped our health services and professional personnel retention.

On June 10, I attended the Inland Fishing and Hunting Committee meeting at which the elk and bear permits winners were drawn. There were 387 applications for four elk permits.

On June 11, we had our workshop and talked about still being \$34 million in debt, which will, hopefully, be paid off in the next four to five years. We were told that the Housing Authority has \$30 million in assets. We had to write off \$30 million to clean up the Greentown fiasco.

We discussed the Frazier property we purchased in Epoufette in January. We had voted to spend up to \$10,000 on a phase one project to allow small boaters to gain access, but it is now suggested to spend an additional \$20,000 to get a project design so we can apply for a grant that could potentially provide us with \$500,000 in funding to dredge and build a better dock. The money spent on this project is coming out of the fisherman’s fund.

We had a presentation from Human Resources on the wage review process. Right now, we post a position and hire at the minimum rate of pay and that does not allow us to be able to pay someone that has knowledge or skills beyond the minimum qualifications. We need to be able to offer a wage that is based on what that person is bringing to the table in order to recruit the best candidate.

On June 12, I served on an appeal hearing, which is never fun but a part of our policy.

On June 13, I went to the Christmas casino from 10 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. to conduct team member surveys with directors Morrow and Carr-Anderson. It is sad to see so many team members afraid to fill out surveys fearing management will find out what they wrote. We assured them that only the board will see the actual surveys. The information will be compiled onto a spreadsheet with all that sites comments.

On June 14, I attended our monthly elders’ Unit 3 meeting. We discussed the team member surveys, the hiring freeze and plans for Wequayoc cemetery. The elders would like to see bi-monthly or monthly clean up days at the cemetery and Grimes property to keep the grass mowed and maintained. The property is beautiful and I hope we can find or raise money in the future to use it as a culture camp for gathering and teachings. The elders voted whether to go to Branson, Mo., or New York. Some elders wanted to go to Branson but the New York trip had more votes so the trip is

planned for Oct. 5-11 for about \$575 per person, with some of that being covered by their savings account. You must be at least 60 to qualify. The elders deserve this trip because many spend a lot of time fundraising. The annual elders picnic will be on Aug. 7 at noon at the McCann School building. Keith and I will be serving barbeque chicken and brats with the elders bringing in side dishes.

On June 17, I attended the Great Lakes Fishing Committee meeting. Following that meeting was the first of our meetings between the board of directors, the fishermen and staff to review maps and discuss our plan for the 2020 Consent Decree. About 30 fishermen attended and we met for three hours. The next meeting will be in Naubinway on Aug. 28 at 6 p.m. at the community building following the elders monthly meeting.

On June 18, we had our workshop and meeting in Escanaba. We met with three men from the DNR to establish a better relationship between the tribe and the state. Many of our fishermen feel they are being targeted or treated unfairly, so we wanted to be able to address those concerns. There are 24 state-licensed commercial fishing operations. Five of them in the U.P. with three in the 1836 Treaty ceded territory. There are seven in the whole state fishing in the 1836 Treaty area. In 2011, there were 105 tribal fishing licenses under the 1836 Treaty. Half of those were Sault Tribe members. There were 379 subsistence licenses and 351 of them were Sault Tribe with 30 percent of them in the Bay de Noc area. There were 147 special permits to harvest wall-eye in the U.P. and 98 percent were in the Bay de Noc area. In 2012, the DNR had 85,000 contacts with fishermen (state, tribal, commercial, subsistence and recreational). Of those contacts, 2.3 percent resulted in tickets and 1.9 percent of tribal resulted in a ticket. There were 600-700 contacts with commercial fishermen. DNR officers do not write tickets directly to the fishermen, they give violations and it is up to the prosecutor to decide what counts he/she will charge and then the tickets are written. There was discussion on having a conservation officer out of the Escanaba area. There are four conservation officers working out of the Manistique area.

We had a discussion that we need to review our hiring policy. In my opinion, it is Indian preference vs. entitlement. I stand by giving Sault Tribe members preference when all things are equal. What I do not agree with is members thinking they are entitled to things such as a job. We need to get rid of this mentality. We should be giving opportunities, not guarantees. Some may not like to think of our organization in a business sense, but we must. We have members who think they can quit today and come back tomorrow because they have a tribal card. This is not good for team member morale or customer service. Like I continue to say, we

need to teach our members how to become self-sufficient, not program dependent. I want our members to have the opportunities for employment and advancement but it must be EARNED. They still need to follow the policies, come to work and do their job even when they don’t want to. If this is the way we are going to operate our businesses, we will not prosper and succeed and neither will our members.

I believe the key to success is for each team member to feel ownership. How would you act if this was your business? How would you treat your customer? As a manager, you need to ask yourself what you expect out of your team member and relay that to them. As a team member, you should know what is expected of you and do it with pride. We need better communication and respect from our management. People don’t communicate and situations don’t get resolved until they escalate to explosion. Please communicate with your staff and try to resolve their concerns, breeding a better work environment.

The Health Center recently earned CARF accreditation for behavioral health. They operate on a \$30 million budget with about \$18 million from IHS, \$7 million in third party revenue (funds from billing client’s insurance company) and about \$5 million in grants and tribal support. They are almost operating with no tribal support. Thank you to all the health center team members for providing one of the most vital services to our members.

We discussed our recent annual audits and discussed hiring an outside firm to conduct audits of our marketing and food and beverage departments for efficiencies. Those are the areas we are going to start with. Savings found will expand the audits to other areas.

On June 20, I was in the Sault casino doing team member surveys from 10 a.m. to 7p.m.

On June 21, we had a 1 p.m. TAP meeting and we discussed sending out the surveys separately or with the census surveys that will be sent out. I prefer separate for a few reasons: (1) we were going to send surveys within the service area so we know what we are doing right and what the gaps are. (2) The costs of the surveys are covered under our Tribal Action Plan grant. (3) Sending out two surveys together may cause some people to choose one or the other.

On June 21, I was at the St. Ignace casino doing team member surveys from 3-9 p.m. There were concerns about being short dealers to open tables because they are filling in at keno or some had been given the day off or called in. It happened to be the night of a poker tournament, which is not good. I prefer we hire two more keno clerks to fully staff the department.

On June 22, I was at the Sault casino doing team member surveys from 3-10 p.m. They had similar concerns about being short in the pit and using pit bosses to cover for shift managers. This was supposed to be the last scheduled

survey date but since the Sault and St. Ignace are the largest sites, I will be doing one more visit at each casino in July. If you did not get a chance to fill one out, please call or email me for a time that works for you.

On June 24, I went to the Elders Advisory Committee meeting in Newberry from 12:30-2:20 p.m. In the prior month’s meeting minutes, I was listed as attending but nothing I said was recorded. Maybe they didn’t like what I had to say? The chairman was telling the elders that we have a \$350,000 projected deficit. I did not agree. We have never been given numbers to back this up. Divisions have been finding ways to save money and, even though we have had unexpected expenses arise, we still have not been told anything like this by our CFO. At least monthly we have financials and that has not been presented even though we know the casinos are down. Elders had concerns with the dress code in the casinos and with getting appointments in certain areas.

On June 24, we had enterprise and casino financials from 4-6 p.m. Our numbers are still down for the casinos but there is starting to be a rebound. I would like to see free well drinks and free draft beer while gaming. We discussed the economy, competition and reduced bridge traffic as areas of concern.

On June 25, we had our workshop and board meeting at 10 a.m. in the Sault. This meeting was held in place of our regular July 2 scheduled meeting. We discussed more casino issues and voted to put the executive director over the Health Division and Housing Commission. Some were concerned why we made that decision when it was not on the agenda. We have had issues that we need to address and Christine (executive director) will be able to get things in order. The chairman does not have enough time to deal with the Health Division. Christine was the best person we have hired since I have been on the board. She takes care of business — making people follow policy and holding people accountable.

On June 27, I attended the funeral of elder Shirley Konle of Epoufette. Shirley was an amazing lady. She loved to cook and surround herself with kids. When I left the burial, I went down to the Frazier property the tribe bought and took some pictures. There is a lot of work that needs to be done that I didn’t realize. There needs to be a cleanup and the water is shallow and mucky. There is a run-down building and old fuel oil tanks on it, a tug and stacks of broken concrete. I was hoping small boats could launch there for the fall run but it is not looking that way.

On June 28, I went to the St. Ignace casino to see how things were going in preparation for the car show. The final touches to brace the bleachers for the arrival of at least 2,500 people were almost complete. There were quite a few people around and staff was setting up for the concessions.

On June 29, I went down to the car show and noticed once again they had put a booth in front of the casino booth. The casino was selling monster truck tickets. The downtown was busier than I have seen it in a few years. I later went to the monster truck show at 5:30 p.m. and was glad I went when I did because it got crowded fast. There was seating for 2,500 and they were selling lawn chairs to accommodate the unexpected crowd of over 3,000. As an adult, if you paid \$10 and brought your ticket in the casino, you received \$10 in free credits. Kids were free. The show went very well and was a great turn out for a first try. I believe about 600 people came in the casino and played. It was the first time in a long time that the restaurant had a line at the door. The staff did a great job with this event. I especially want to thank all the people who worked on assembling the bleachers for weeks. Great team work!

On July 1 and 2, we had a special meeting. We met with each government division to get an accurate picture of their budget. At the conclusion of the meetings we were at a projected \$200,000 in the black. All directors and staff are doing a great job of cost savings.

I would like to take this time to address a concern I have that I did discuss with the board. I think that, as tribal members and team members, we owe it to ourselves and our tribe as a whole to stop bashing our team members and businesses on social media. If you truly care about the tribe and/or your place of employment, you would not do it. If you have a concern, it should be addressed to a manager, a board member, the chairman or his staff. Our team members work very hard and when people complain or bash things in their areas it is hard on employee morale. They should not have to feel like they need to defend themselves, especially over things over which they may have no control. Also, bad publicity is not what our tribe or our businesses need. Think before you do it!

The week of Aug. 5 is the FREE Jr. Police Academy at Boedne Bay (close to Brevort Lake Campground). This is a great camp for youth 11-15 years of age; watch the newspaper for more information or call 635-6065. I have decided to try and raise \$1,000 for this. I am going to allow law enforcement to tase me as a presentation to the kids. Please join me in this great cause and mail donations made out to Sault Tribe Jr. Police Academy 2334 Shore Dr., St. Ignace, MI 49781.

I would also like to remind everyone that Keith and I have Unit 3 meetings on the fourth Monday of the month at the McCann elders building at 6 p.m. We can answer any questions and give updates.

As always, thanks for the phone calls, cards and emails. Feel free to contact me at bsorenson@saulttribe.net, call my office at 643-2123 or cell 430-0536.

Enjoy the summer!