

# Sorenson attends MAST gathering in capitol



**BRIDGETT SORENSON,  
DIRECTOR, UNIT III**

On Feb. 10 I flew to D.C. and arrived that evening. On Feb. 11 we met with the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST), which consists of 33 tribes from Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana and Iowa. During the three days, we had many guest speakers from D.C., such as assistant secretary of the Department of the Interior, Kevin Washburn; director of Indian Health Services, Dr. Yvette Roubideaux; staff director of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, Mary Pavel; Congressman Dan Kildee; staff director of the House of Indian Affairs Subcommittee, Chris Fluhr; and NIGA Chairman-Ernie Stevens.

Some of the issues that were discussed were drug abuse in Indian Country, the sequestration, losing our treaty rights because

of environmental issues, the farm bill, adoptive couple vs. baby girl case and the changes to FEMA where tribes can ask directly for disaster assistance.

MAST passed a resolution to support Sally Jewell's appointment as secretary of the Interior and a resolution calling for new Obama Native nations policy which details support beginning with President Johnson through President George W. Bush.

After the MAST meeting, Darcy, Denise, Joanie, Mike McCoy and I got to spend about 40 minutes running through three floors of the National Museum of the American Indian. It is awesome and we could have spent several hours there.

On the afternoon of Feb. 12, Cathy, Jennifer and I went on Capitol Hill to visit senators and congressman to discuss our concerns with sequestration and telling them that IHS should be exempt from cuts, like Medicare will be. We talked about the effects of mining on the Great Lakes, invasive species in the Great Lakes, our support for the Violence Against Women Act, the farm bill, etc. Our whole Sault Tribe group met with Dan Benishek. These leaders really do like to hear from tribal leaders. Some have no idea about Indian Country issues so it allows us to educate them and make those connections.

On Feb. 19, I rode with Catherine and Lana to Lansing.

We met with legislators where Chairman Payment presented a power point on the Indian tuition waiver. Many colleges and universities are waiving thousands of dollars so Native Americans can achieve a higher education. Universities such as LSSU and NMU waive \$350,000 and Grand Valley waives \$600,000 a year.

That afternoon, the United Tribes met with state liaisons to discuss open lines of communication with the tribes. We want to ensure the government-to-government relations that encompass our sovereignty. We would like to be included when there are discussions such as the wolf legislation and environmental issues. We want to work with the State of Michigan as a team to resolve issues.

Our tribe had a reception with Michigan legislators (Frank Foster, Howard Walker, etc.) to get to know each other and then went to the United Tribes reception for a brief period. We had a private dinner with the assistant secretary of the Interior of Indian Affairs, Kevin Washburn. We discussed the Indian tuition waiver, sequestration, the Baby Veronica case (ICWA) and invasive species on the Great Lakes.

On Feb. 20, we had our United Tribes meeting and discussed the Affordable Health Care Act implementation, wolf hunt, Indian tuition waiver and passed a resolution in opposition to the S.S. Badger car ferry for continued

coal discharge into the Great Lakes.

In the evening we had our "at large" membership meeting at the Lansing Center. We met with about 100 members from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. I thought the meeting went very well. Mayor Virg Bernero stopped in to introduce himself. The audience had questions about the Lansing casino, the proposed constitution, the internship program, the funeral fund, the overall casino performance, our debt, and future services. I believe the "at large" members just need to be educated and understand the tribe in general. Many only have the tribal paper and social media to be kept informed. We discussed having more meetings when we are in the area on other business so we are not spending extra money. One misconception was that members thought we used our entire membership count to get federal dollars. We can only use the numbers in our seven-county service area.

On Feb. 26, we had a workshop and meeting at the St. Ignace casino. During the board issues we were interrupted by the COO and law enforcement telling the chairman of a bomb threat to our hotel. The chairman told the board we needed to leave and the board secretary would send them an update. I helped Tom Biron pack up his audio/video equipment and went to the casino lobby. Hotel guests were asked

to leave their rooms and wait in the lobby or the restaurant. They were served food and beverages during this two-hour investigation. The COO, Tony Goetz went with the state police bomb dog through 81 hotel rooms while county and tribal officers combed the rest of the casino. The staff and law enforcement did a great job of keeping everyone calm and the investigation went like a well practiced drill. The caller left a message on the hotel's answering machine that there was a bomb in the hotel. The suspect has been caught and is awaiting charges. Chief Marchand did a great job talking with all the guests and controlling the situation. Denny McKelvie and I were present during the investigation.

There are petitions available to stop the wolf hunts, please contact a membership liaison to get more information at (906) 635-6050. The board approved an offer on our St. Ignace Lakefront Hotel which should be finalized mid-April. We will need to secure rooms with other hotels during overflows for tournaments, weddings, etc., until we can build onto our current hotel. I would like to say "thank you" to all of our staff for their daily contributions to keep our members and customers served.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns at bsorenson@saulttribe.net, bridgett91@yahoo.com or (906) 430-0536.