

# Board hopes to have tribe debt free in four years



**BRIDGETT SORENSON, DIRECTOR, UNIT III**

On Aug. 6, we had our board workshop in the Sault. We discussed our current \$28 million debt of which we pay \$7 million a year with about \$800,000 in interest. We are hoping to be debt free in four years. The recent JD Edwards upgrade and new computers will add less than two months to that time frame.

Innovative Gaming Solutions was the company we hired to do an audit of our marketing and food outlets. We decided to have IGS come back to discuss a plan of action two weeks after the board has received the written report. This should occur in September. We discussed our proposed self-insurance shortfall of \$1.2 million for the year. The Insurance Department had discussed our options with (1) being increasing the employer portion by 10 percent retroactive to January (this was included in everyone's 2013 budget) and/or increase the team member portion. I did not agree with the team member increase at this time. I am a member of the Insurance Adhoc Committee that was formed to find solutions. We had decided to survey the team members for ways to cut without too much of a team member increase. The survey is behind schedule so I am not going to raise rates without team member input. The surveys will be going out in the next week or so.

The board sat down that afternoon and opened all of the casino team member surveys. Each unit read aloud a few comments from the surveys. The surveys will be put into a spreadsheet format according to casino. The membership liaisons are inputting all of the data for a final report to the board.

On the evening Aug. 6 we drove to Kinross for our meeting. We voted to request four of our properties to be put into trust. Those properties are the Frazier

dock we bought in January in Epoufette, the Grimes (Wequayoc cemetery) we bought last August between St. Ignace and Hessel, the Grand Marais site (fishing access) and our M-28 property. We have been granted trust status on many of our properties this year, which will be saving us a lot of tax dollars each year. We voted to amend chapter code 10: Tribal Election Ordinance Special Advisory Election. This change will allow us to fill an unexpected vacancy of the chairperson or board member within a 65-day time frame. To condense the time frame we removed a primary election, which will also save money on printing and mailing costs if there is ever a need for a special advisory election.

We voted to apply for a grant from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust in the amount of \$652,000 to fund the construction of the Frazier dock for fishermen access to Lake Michigan. The tribe shall be notified in November if we have received approval. Half of the expense will be for the dredging and retaining walls. I definitely support site access for our fisherman but I am concerned when we have been asked three times to increase the amount of funds to be taken out of the Fishermen's Fund in a short amount of time. I believe we would all like to see a more comprehensive approach the first time. Some believe it is only money out of the Fishermen's Fund, which it is, but we need to only spend what is necessary.

On Aug. 7, the Unit III elders had their annual summer picnic with Keith and I barbecuing chicken and brats. We had a very good turnout with many great side dishes and desserts prepared by our elders.

On Aug. 8, I went to the Sault Tribe Jr. Police Academy to be tased. The feeling was kind of indescribable; it was not so much pain but more of a debilitating shock to your system. It lasted about five seconds. My family was worried about me and my kids didn't want to see it happen but my friend brought out my mom and my niece wanted to come so my youngest son decided to also, so they could record it. The camp is in such a beautiful area and a great learning experience for the kids and free to their parents. I raised \$400 for the academy and I want to thank all those that contributed to the cause. Miigwech!

On Aug. 9 was our Unit III elder meeting where we discussed

the latest information and discussed upcoming events. In the afternoon was our TAP (Tribal Action Plan) meeting for substance abuse. I hate to say this but we are still working on the membership survey and making each question count.

On Aug. 12, the board met to discuss what our options were on the recent terminations of team members because of background checks. This has been an ongoing issue which affected many long term team members. The area of concern was whether certain positions actually had regular contact and control over children in positions such as housing. The law requires that a person with one felony or two misdemeanors of a crime against a person would be disqualified in being in these positions. Most if not all housing positions have regular contact with children.

On Aug. 13, we had our workshop to discuss the board's priorities, values and drivers when considering the 2014 budgets. We have to consider sequestration, our insurance shortfall, the impact of the affordable health care act and declining revenue. LSSU President Tony McLain and staff gave a presentation of new happenings at the school such as the new Lukenda School of Business and also the number of students at LSSU that have been awarded the tuition waiver. In the past three years there have been between 95 and 105 students awarded the tuition waiver costing up to \$752,000 annually. The money received from the state of Michigan does not come close to covering these costs and endangering the future of the waiver.

On Aug. 16, I held office hours, On Aug. 17, I went to the Hessel powwow.

On Aug. 19 we had our casino oversight meeting. The St. Ignace Casino Hotel earned the 2013 Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence by the world's largest travel website. Great job by all the hotel team members, who many times have a very thankless job. Thank you to all the people that make the property a great success! The Shores casino has received their banner for the main sign saying, "Voted #1 Casino in Michigan by Michigan Travel Vacation Magazine." The team members are wearing buttons saying this. There are also new advertisements. There was discussion on the casinos still being in the black but revenues are still down around \$1 million

for 2013. After reading about 30 percent of the written IGS report, I am starting to believe we need to hire a highly qualified CEO for our casinos to make the necessary changes to thrive again.

I attended the Great Lakes Conservation meeting. The fishermen voted to escrow a fishing license to a son of a fisherman that had passed on in May while he attends college. They discussed the Great Lakes Fishery Trust application and the committee actually caught the four feet dredging proposal that they wanted changed to six feet. There was discussion on whether a fisherman could moor a boat on state land and our attorney said it is not covered by our consent decree so we have to obey the DNR.

On Aug. 20 we had our workshop and meeting in Marquette. The board voted to increase the employer portion of health insurance premiums to 10 percent retroactive to January. The team member portion may be modified after reviewing the survey results in the upcoming months. We voted to continue funding 8 of our cost centers that have September—August budget cycles with last year's funding levels for the next 30 days. We are waiting on federal funding awards for these programs which should be in the next few weeks. We voted to move unspent money in the Human Resources Director position to a consulting line item. We will be considering hiring a consultant until we secure a director for the vacant position. We voted to authorize management to re-adjust/reduce those team members that are over the maximum that their positions allow per our last wage survey if the raises occurred outside of the board allowed raises within that year, or where no re-factoring of the position or justification occurred. At the Kinross meeting a tribal member presented the board secretary with two removal petitions for Unit II representative Catherine Hollowell. One of the petitions did not have enough signatures with 98 of the 100 required. The board voted to have our general counsel, John Wernet, verify all signatures and review the charges and provide a written report for the Sept. 3 meeting. At that time the board will decide whether further action is warranted. The Inland Conservation Committee voted not to charge active duty military members license issuing fees. The board also agreed and voted in support of that.

There was also concern from a downstate member about the board supporting paying for the livestream. This was another heated discussion which I discussed some of these points in my last report. I was then accused by Tom of saying I quoted in my article of him doing shady business. I said, "Did I say Tom is doing shady business?" My actual quote was "I don't like shady business," in regards to the previous sentences in my report about being no contract attached when voting on this and not following the bid process. I was then accused of bullying this person. I am sorry if he feels like I was bullying him by discussing my opinions and facts of the livestreaming. It is my job to let the membership know what is taking place. I did say that I would tell the truth even if it is not what you may want to hear. Now this person is making Youtube videos of clips from our meetings. Now I may have to say this could be on the verge of "shady" if these are used for political purposes for someone's agenda. I believe the person should be a neutral party not being led around by a certain group.

On Aug. 23, I held office hours and went to the enterprise and casino financials. We discussed the loss of revenue from the asbestos in the hangar. We discussed that we are fast approaching our limit of tax-free tobacco products (not cigarettes) quota. Cigarettes will probably last until November and the gas quota may be lifted in December according to current projections.

On the evening of Aug. 23, Keith and I followed our Unit III elders in the Parade of Nations during Heritage week in St. Ignace. This is the second year and is growing with the powwow being the culmination of events. Our elders did an awesome job on their building of a longhouse for their float.

On Aug. 25, I attended the Rendezvous at the Straits Powwow. The food and vendor booths always offer a great variety compared to some of the other powwows.

I apologize for having to write a shorter report than I would have liked but am now limited to 1,900 words. Feel free to contact me with questions or concerns at bsorenson@saulttribe.net, bridgett91@yahoo.com, office 643-2123 or cell 430-0536. Enjoy September!