

# Board members attend Tribal Leadership Summit in Lansing



**JENNIFER MCLEOD,  
DIRECTOR, UNIT I**

Aanii, Anishinaabeg! Last month, I drove to Lansing for the Tribal Leadership Summit with Governor Snyder. Directors Kim Gravelle and Dennis McKelvie were there as well. Chairman Payment did not attend and asked Director McKelvie to be his delegate. It is an important meeting, and an opportunity to deal with the State of Michigan on a “government-to-government” level. This meeting was attended by many of the Michigan tribes. Director McKelvie and other tribe’s chiefs/chairpersons/presidents sat at the table with the governor and other tribal repre-

sentatives sat in multiple rows around the room. It was well attended.

I was very proud of Denny McKelvie. Prior to the summit, he met with Kim and I to discuss the “white papers” and to decide what issues he should present to the governor. Whenever we meet with state and federal officials, our tribal staff prepare “white papers” for us to use to make certain that we have the information needed to express our issues. The “white papers” are generally bullet lists of talking points, and I can’t express enough how valuable this work is. Our staff are the experts, not board members, and they do an excellent job preparing us for these presentations.

Standing under the magnificent dome of the state Senate, I was struck by the irony of three Sault Tribe leaders having a mini-meeting in the hall of the Senate building, working out our strategy. I am old enough to remember a time when our people were not only uninvited to the state Senate, but had three of us met in one of the hallways it would have attracted “serious” attention. How times have

changed.

Director McKelvie sat next to Governor Snyder. When it was his time to speak, Director McKelvie spoke with respect and clarity. In Denny’s unique manner, he boldly told of issues that affect our tribal veterans. As a veteran himself, Denny provided firsthand testimony of the challenges ALL veterans face. Denny spoke against the Enbridge pipeline, strongly cautioning the governor that the state shouldn’t wait for the pipeline to leak before doing something about it. Denny spoke of other issues as well, and by the time he was finished, the heads of the other Indians in the room were nodding in agreement.

At the end of the meeting, there were the typical photo opportunities with the governor that included Director Gravelle and I. During that time, I seized the opportunity to ask the governor how we could develop better cooperation between state, county and tribal drug courts. As a result, we are now in the process of setting up a conference call meeting between myself and state legal counsel to strategize on ways to encourage county courts to

work with tribal drug courts. Other states do this, it benefits tribal families, saves the state and county money and helps keep our people out of jails. I am hopeful that some progress can be made!

On the home front, the politics have not been improving. The games continue and, sadly, appear to be getting worse. The toxic leadership continues, despite good efforts of good people. Sometimes I shake my head and wish I could just write up a referral and send the naughty kids to the principal’s office, lol. However, there STILL are good things happening.

The gymnasium at the tribal school is proceeding nicely. The excitement among staff, parents and especially the children is building. Many thanks to our hardworking tribal project team for meeting on a weekly basis, and the great job of keeping everyone up to speed and accountable. I also want to give a HUGE THANK YOU to our contractor, Moore-Trosper, for their extra attention to safety and willingness to work on weekends to minimize noise distractions and parental con-

cerns. I have been on site and have been completely impressed by crew professionalism and hard work. Our children deserve the best, and so far it looks like that is what they are getting. Chi-miigwech, Moore-Trosper and the tribal project team!

Other good things are happening, too! Our tribal service departments continue to do their good work of serving our people. When I meet with other tribes and listen to the challenges they face in their communities, I am always so proud of the programs we have and the caring folks that make it possible.

On a final note, it is nearing the time for our traditional ghost feasts and suppers, also known as giibi feasts. Look on the tribal website calendars for dates, times and locations. If you would like to learn more, please feel free to contact me or our Culture Department at (906) 635-6050.

Anishinaabe gagige  
(Anishinaabe for always)

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