

# Tribal elder numbers will double in 15 years



**KEITH MASSAWAY, DIRECTOR,  
UNIT III**

First of all, I would like to wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. This time of year is so busy, but please take a moment to reflect on family and friends because the love and affection they give is the best gift of all.

The board had a briefing from the Enrollment Department in a recent workshop. Some of the

questions we have received lately have had to do with different aspects of our membership, so it would be prudent and informative to give some of the answers to everyone. The tribe, as of Nov. 13, 2012, consists of exactly 40,812 members. That may surprise many of you but we add members every day by birth. On average, we add 800 children to our rolls each year. If a child is not enrolled by the 18th birthday, they will be unable to be added to the rolls since our rolls are still closed for adults.

The Enrollment Department is also showing that the membership is aging. In 2012, we have 4,442 elders. In a graph, the department showed the elder population will grow exponentially. In 2017, they project 6,210 elders. In 2022, it is 8,857. So, in 10 years we approximately double the number of elders. That shows how the baby boomers will affect the elder dividend checks in the near future. The projections end

at 2027, 15 years from now, are 12,345 elders.

This is a reality the tribe has to face. The strain that an aging membership will put on our services will be huge. We must plan now to be ready for it. Prescriptions, medical facilities, housing and other services will be exhausted if we don't plan now. I fear that this fact was not acknowledged by some of the board. If we fail to plan now, no plan will work in the future because it will be too late to implement.

At the last board of directors meeting in November, an ad hoc health access group was formed with a member of the board from each unit and several health professionals. I am proud to say I will be the representative from Unit III. The group is charged with exploring how to bring health care access to our membership, including expanding outreach to rural members and to expand access to after hours care.

We are to report back to the full board with possible increased services in the neediest areas as soon as we can.

Our Information Systems Department reported that our computing infrastructure is in dire need of upgrades and overhauls. It seems our primary operating system has now been deemed archaic and is not being supported anymore. That means we have to replace it. Sounds easy, but it is not easy or inexpensive. The JD Edwards upgrade alone will cost over \$1 million. The changes in servers, computers and email systems with all the ancillary support will cost \$7.4 million over the next four years.

As I said earlier, we have to plan now because it will be too late to plan later. The decisions the board makes today will be what a future board will inherit. So, good decisions will make a future board look good and bad ones will only compound the problems later. Again, I wish all

of you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and thank you for all the cards and email.

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