

Yearly NIGA convention a great learning experience



**KEITH MASSAWAY,
DIRECTOR, UNIT III**

Last month, I attended
the National Indian Gaming

Association yearly convention and expo. It is a great learning experience each time I go. The first two days are full of breakout sessions and general assemblies. A very broad scope of all aspects of gaming are covered, from rules and regulations to gaming machines and best practices.

This year, a large number of sessions dealt with the possibility of online gaming. Networking with several contacts, I was able to get invited to a couple of side conversations that could work out in the future to be very beneficial to the tribe. Also, a large block of sessions was set up on legal and accounting practices. On the legal end, I concentrated on what tribes are going through with compact

negotiations with their states. One session even used Michigan tribes as an example. It seems we are not in as bad a situation as many tribes in other states. Some have given up a lot to game and even some have started to give up limited sovereign rights to appease states.

In Michigan, we will not be giving up our rights and we are negotiating from a very strong position. Other notables were sessions on marketing and player comps. I learned a lot about how different tribes and private casinos run those departments. On the third day, the convention floor opened for the exposition. All the new casino slots and games are available and so much

more, cash counting machines and redemption centers, architects and engineers along with hotel outfitters and casino carpets and amenities. I focused a lot of time on our redemption centers.

We are currently exploring replacing our casinos' outdated machines. The very cutting edge of technology is so vibrant and exciting but also very expensive. Gathering all my notes and literature, I have given a verbal report to the tribal board and to the gaming commission. I will follow up with a written report to the casino COO and staff soon.

The Ojibwa Museum in St. Ignace hosted festivities on its grounds for Heritage Days. It was a beautiful day and a great event.

Congratulations go to everyone involved. The Fort De Baude in St. Ignace has a new exhibit. It is a display of lithographs from a long lost Smithsonian exhibit, *The History of the Indian Tribes of North America*. And 121 portraits are hung in a special room for all to enjoy. The original chalk and oil paintings were destroyed in a fire at the Smithsonian. They were painted by McKenny and Hall from 1836 to 1844. It is a great chance to see our Native chiefs as they looked when they traveled to Washington, D.C., in the early 1800s. Thank you for all the calls and e-mails. Keith Massaway, 702 Hazelton Street, St. Ignace, MI 49781, (906) 643-6981, kmassaway@msn.com.