

# Persistence continues in developing improvements



**LANA CAUSLEY, DIRECTOR,  
UNIT II**

It's been quite a month and I want to speak about three separate items we have on the forefront right now. The board resolved and passed a resolution that the tribe's Gaming Authority will schedule meetings twice a month with the casino chief operating officer for purposes of oversight, review and implementation of consultant driven analysis, recommendations and ongoing implementation of standards from the team members survey project.

During recommendations from the consultant analysis it was reported we were overstaffed in our restaurants and delis. We have not reduced staff in years based on the revenue and hours of operations. A small amount of employees did have hours reduced strictly based on the best interest of expense for the business and was the driver for the decision. These reductions are based on the audit we received and ongoing analysis of our operations and should continue for a better bottom line and stricter staffing and efficiency measures. I don't like agreeing to any reduction in hours but we also MUST increase our bottom line for our business, any recommendations that come forward for cost savings I will support (unless they are vendettas and targets). It's been many years since we have completed an in-depth review of our casino budgets for efficiency.

We also passed a budget for 2014. This came with a week-long special meeting called to look at every single budget within our governmental division (we did not start the 2014 casino budgets yet). We had each department go through their respective line items and make recommendation to reduce 5 percent in tribal support dollars and 2 percent in federal funding dollars. Both needed to be done as we are simply not making our revenue on the casino side (we commit the revenue dollars of a projected \$17 million for services, if we don't make the revenue we do not have it for the budget) and sequestration is forcing us on the federal side (again, this is why measures are being taken in our casinos).

The recommendations in the 2014 budget on the governmental side came from the staff and administration to minimize impact on services and positions. It's a very hard decision to make, but the goal is better efficiency in our business side and leaner spending on the governmental side. We have always known that the government struggles would impact us and I'm afraid this is just the start of more to come. I can say that I'm confident that the board is informed, conscious of services and struggles at each and every decision made.

We did have to make the decision of reducing all raises for select team members (these items are still happening and it baffles me that it still goes on with the seriousness of our budget issues, we saved \$182,691 by taking out raises for select departments (all employees need raises). I'm impressed that all but one board member supported our overall 2014 budgets, including the chairman. This came with hours and hours of discussion, heated feelings and yes, compromise. We must move on from this and continue to stay the goal of debt free in three-and-a-half years. This will free up about \$8 million more dollars for programs

and services. I know I sound like a broken record, but financial health for our tribe HAS got to be our priority. Please don't listen to the political spin or untruths on our budget process, any leader who will politicize or prevent efficiency for our tribe as a whole is no leader at all. Please also know that all decisions are not made lightly by myself and it's difficult, I have also committed to taking a reduction in my salary as I did in 2008 when we had to reduce our budgets. No politics, just fact.

Also, another project impacting our casino is the outcome of the team member surveys completed. This past summer, the board of directors began the process of compiling a survey of questions for our team members. We respectively went to each casino to encourage and gather your input on what your concerns are as an employee and suggestions for better customer service. When we started this, it came with a sincere desire to make Kewadin a better place to work. We wanted to hear your input individually and confidentially.

We gathered many concerns, compliments, complaints and suggestions from each of you. I personally took this process seriously and we all had an opportunity to meet on four separate work sessions so far, for a plan to move forward. The board is in the process of identifying and prioritizing concerns from you and each individual casino. We as a board have agreed our most evident problem is that our team members do not feel appreciated and the morale is very disheartening. I want to acknowledge you and let you know that I went through every single survey. We were tasked as a board to review and report in each casino the many items that need to be worked on, including communication, morale, cleanliness, promotion, training, policy issues and many more. Please know that I am committed to see that we move a plan

forward. You will see us working toward changes that we can implement immediately as well as long-term goals so we serve you, as a team member, better. This is not blowing smoke, I will expect significant outcomes from this project as other board members do and we meet bi-weekly on this project. I even submitted a resolution to schedule mandatory Gaming Authority meetings to move on all input. I do want to say there were also many compliments from our staff, we not only identified the cons in the survey, we also listed the pros so that we can continue on those.

So, in short, we have three separate items in the works — the 2014 governmental budgets, the casino comprehensive analysis of recommendations and the casino team member survey for suggestions and input. With all of these items, changes must and will occur. The outcome of all three should impact us in a positive way financially and make Kewadin a better place for customers and team members. It's not gone over lightly by me and I will be at the table demanding positive outcomes for these projects.

I attended a meeting of the state's tribes, United Tribes of Michigan. During this meeting, we had a presentation done by Jason Allen, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency. The presentation held my interest because I do know that, within our own tribe, we do not have a handle on the number of veterans or disabled members that we have. In the presentation, it was stated that Michigan's total for veterans is estimated at 680,427, with a total of 5,798 being Native American. This is inaccurate data for us and we lack in that data and need to gather this info any available way we can. We need to report the accurate numbers. In today's Michigan Census, Native Americans are one of the best ethnic groups in the armed forces since the Vietnam era, so

I'm sure our numbers are not getting recorded correctly. There are many factors for each individual veteran as stated at the presentation, "there is no common computing platform for each individual veteran." There are qualifiers for each individual tour, time served, exposure and new items added as they collect data. It's a lesson I learned and hopefully our veterans have all the benefits entitled to them. I'm not confident they do, so please contact the official website for the state or contact our representative Ron Munroe to assist at [munroe@centurylink.net](mailto:munroe@centurylink.net). I've already spoken to Director McKelvie about my thoughts (he is not only a veteran but is the strongest advocate on our board for our armed forces) and I will assist in all our endeavors to calculate our own tribes numbers as well as any situations where we can assist. It's worth calling and checking to make sure you have been receiving all the benefits.

We held our ghost feast to feed our community and feast our ancestors who have passed on. It was so amazing to have such a good fall day. The people, fire, Mukkwa Giizick drum and food. There where memories I won't forget and the participation in our traditions is paramount to our community. I had an opportunity to speak to many members at that time on the future and direction of our tribe, nobody hollered, called names or were disrespectful. WE TALKED to each other and I'm thankful for input and direction.

In closing, I want to assure you that being a grandmother and a daughter drives my decisions on this board. I want my elders to be proud and their needs met and I also want our children to have something to be proud of and look forward to. It's a balance I do not take lightly or without sleepless nights. Please contact me as always at (906) 322-3818, 484 2954 or [lcausley@saultribe.net](mailto:lcausley@saultribe.net). Baamaapii, Lana Causley.