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Sault Tribe's Covid-19 hazard pay and disaster relief payments to be mailed today

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. — Sault Tribe printed thousands of checks to members yesterday, to be mailed out today, Chief Financial Officer Bob Schulte said. Including the normal payroll checks also printed Thursday, the total is more than \$15 million, mostly to communities in the eastern U.P., Schulte said. "The local economy is going to like us when they see all this money floating around," he said.

Tribal officials expect a wave of members seeking to cash their payments at Kewadin Casino or at local banks and credit unions.

Schulte said casino staffers are preparing for a high number of requests to cash the checks, and he said Huntington Bank, Central Savings Bank, PNC Bank and Soo Co-Op Credit Union have been notified that they might see much higher numbers of requests to cash checks.

It took about six hours Wednesday to print the \$1,000 disaster relief checks, Schulte said, and payroll employees were assisted by staff from other departments in putting the checks into envelopes. All the relief checks were taken to the post office yesterday afternoon.

He said 12,340 disaster-relief checks totaling \$12.34 million were printed.

The amounts of the hazard pay checks varied, but those, also printed yesterday, totaled \$1.1 million. In addition, regular payroll checks, issued this week, totaled roughly \$2 million.

That's a total of \$15.44 million, most of it destined for tribal members in the seven-county service area, Schulte said.

Executive Director Christine McPherson applauded the financial assistance for tribal members.

"I would like to thank the Tribal Chairman and the Tribal Board of Directors for the support and authorization of these programs for the benefit of our tribal members. I know it will not solve all issues but will assist in a small way to help our members. These types of large projects involve many tribal team members' efforts, and it is truly appreciated."

Melissa Morehouse, who works in Enrollment, said the number of disaster-relief checks was about double the usual number of annual elder dividend payments and the operation was under a tight deadline.

Morehouse said 14,000 applications were sent out to tribal members Aug. 7, and Enrollment staffers added three people during the week to help enter the returned applications. (Applications are still being accepted.)

Then the printing and envelope stuffing began. Laurie Mansfield in Payroll said she monitored the printer, reloading paper and making sure there were no jams or other problems. Morehouse was in the Payroll office operating the check-stuffing machine. On the third floor of the administration building, employees from Payroll, Enrollment, Accounting and Legal, plus one board member, hand-stuffed thousands of checks.

“It went smoothly for as big a project as it was,” Morehouse said. “We figured we would have to do that over a two-day period.”