

## PLEASANT POINT

### CHILD WELFARE PROJECT

In early spring three focus groups were held on behalf of Sipayik Human Services: community members including elders, young adults who were in the foster care system as children and service providers in the community. Gail Werrbach and Jennifer Middleton from the University of Maine School of Social Work facilitated the groups.

These groups were part of the Wabanaki Child Welfare Project, which has a project team that meets monthly and a project coordinator, Judy Lucarelli. This work is under the direction of Molly Newell, director of Sipayik Human Services.

The Sipayik team is now reviewing the draft report from the focus groups. The insights gained from the focus groups are valuable, as a practice model and policies for child welfare are developed.



JANICE MURPHY, Sister of Mercy, was the guest of honor at a June 24 open house at Beatrice Rafferty School in Pleasant Point and is holding a photo montage that was presented to her. After many years of service, she is leaving the area in August and returning to Portland.

### ECONOMIC STRATEGY

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy meeting will be held at the community center on Wednesday, July 18, from 6–8 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend, and refreshments will be provided. Contact Vera Francis for more information at 853-2600.

### COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Passamaquoddy at Pleasant Point have an opportunity to secure their community's future by engaging in a broad-based planning process. With a rich culture, valuable assets and dedicated tribal members, the Passamaquoddy are posi-

tioned well to develop a strategy that considers the current needs of tribal members, provides direction to tribal leaders and defines a vision for future generations. Defining and realizing that vision depends on strengthening three core areas: sovereignty, economy, tribal programs.

Over the next nine months tribal leadership, in collaboration with Four Directions Development Corporation in Orono, will seek input and guidance from tribal members that leads to a comprehensive community strategy. Four Directions, a Native community development organization dedicated to advancing social and economic conditions for Wabanaki people, will assist in facilitating a dynamic community-based planning process that evaluates the current state of the Passamaquoddy community; defines fundamental goals and core values; identifies key projects, programs and services that require investment of resources; prioritizes those projects that help; and establishes a plan for implementation that outlines roles, responsibilities and a method to measure progress and impact.

The planning process takes a comprehensive approach to developing a strategy the Passamaquoddy can consider with its governance, its sovereignty and its investments.

The following are areas the process will focus on: tribal governance, cultural development, education, healthcare and social services, housing, partnerships and collaborations, economic development, agriculture and food security, natural resources, energy, tribal ventures and entrepreneurship.

### PINE TREE LEGAL UPDATE

Those who live on the reservation and have received a notice from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) that their TANF benefits will end because of the "lifetime 60-month rule" may want to contact Pine Tree Legal Assistance. TANF recipients who reside on Indian reservations may be exempt from the 60-month rule. Pine Tree Legal Attorney Paul Thibeault can be reached at 255-8656 or 1-877-213-5630.

### HEALTH CENTER PHARMACY

A pharmacy policy change went into effect on July 1. There is a list of medications that will no longer be carried by the pharmacy at the health center. They will no longer pay for medications not stocked in the pharmacy or purchased at private pharmacies. Any requests for medication not currently stocked by the pharmacy must be made by a health center provider and approved through the P&T Committee and the health director before being purchased. No person under the age of 18 will be allowed to pick up prescriptions from the pharmacy.



SIGNING the mandate document for the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission process are (left to right) Chief Richard Getchell of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Chief Joseph Socobasin of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkmikuk, Chief Reuben Clayton Cleaves of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik, Governor Paul LePage, Chief Kirk Francis of the Penobscot Nation and Chief Brenda Commander of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians.

## Tribes, state sign mandate for truth, reconciliation process

Five Wabanaki chiefs and Governor Paul LePage signed a mandate document commencing the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process involving a collaborative effort to examine what has happened, what is happening and what needs to happen regarding Maine child welfare practices affecting Wabanaki people. The public signing ceremony, which took place at the Hall of Flags in the Maine Capitol on June 29, represents a historic agreement between Wabanaki tribal governments and the State of Maine to uncover and acknowledge the truth, create opportunities to heal and learn from the truth and collaborate to operate the best child welfare system possible for Wabanaki children, a goal shared by all the signatories to the Mandate.

Governor LePage declared, "I see this commission as a critical step to improve relations between the state and the tribes. As governor, I believe my administration's relations with the tribes have always been good. Repairing damage from prior administrations is a gesture that is important to me."

The Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare TRC process represents the first truth and reconciliation effort within U.S. territory that has been collaboratively developed between Indian nations and a state government. The idea for the tribal-state TRC originated within a Truth and Reconciliation Convening Group, individuals representing Maine Tribal Child Welfare, Maine State DHHS Office of Child and Family Services, and staff from the Muskie School of Public Service, American Friends Service Committee and Wabanaki Mental Health Associates. Last year all five Wabanaki tribal governments and Governor LePage signed the Declaration of Intent to undertake the TRC. The signing ceremony fulfills that May 24, 2011, commitment.

Chief Kirk Francis of the Penobscot Nation stated, "The TRC process stands out as a model of collaboration that can be replicated not only in other areas of Wabanaki-Maine relations, but between tribes and states across the country that are dealing with [Indian Child Welfare Act] ICWA issues. One of the most distinct aspects of this initiative is that there is no shame and blame, but just people from the tribes and the state who are committed to making sure this never happens again."

Wabanaki and state representatives have been collaborating for more than a decade, which has and will continue to improve the child welfare system for Wabanaki children. In spite of this progress, Maine's child welfare history continues to impact Wabanaki children and families to-

day. The governments have come to realize that they must unearth the story of Wabanaki people's experiences in order to fully uphold the spirit, letter and intent of the ICWA in a way that is consistent with the law and promotes healing.

Chief Brenda Commander of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians affirmed, "As the chief of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, a mother and a grandmother, I know the incredible importance of our children. At one time, 16% of all Maliseet children were in state custody. The disproportionate taking of our children threatened the survival of our tribe. I am pleased that the State of Maine stands ready to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and move forward on a new path guided by systems reform and best practices for our children."

Chief Richard Getchell of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs cited the impact of boarding schools on the Micmac people. "Many of our people survived the Canadian and American boarding school system. The trauma that those children, who are now the elders of our tribe, grandmothers and grandfathers, have unwittingly passed down through the generations needs to be acknowledged so we can heal as individuals, families and as a tribe. This Truth and Reconciliation Commission process is crucial to that healing. We must give our people the opportunity to share their experiences, to bring voice to all that has been suppressed and repressed for far too many years."

Chief Joseph Socobasin of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkmikuk added, "By unearthing and acknowledging the truth, we are able to deal with the pain and heal from the trauma. The past informs the future and once Wabanaki and state citizens are able to share their experiences and tell their stories, we can reconcile the past with the present to make a better future."

Chief Reuben Clayton Cleaves of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik concluded, "Today's event is another step in the right direction for recovery and a perfect example of 'government-to-government relations.' In the Passamaquoddy language, one word summarizes this special event — wipomawsawkon."

Next steps will include the seating of a 13-member selection panel that will choose the five TRC commissioners, selecting the members of the TRC, the TRC organizing itself and the commission securing additional funding. Throughout the process Wabanaki community groups led by community members will provide support and a local point of contact for all Wabanaki people who become involved in the TRC process.



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