

Shakopee drops fight with Mdewakanton Sioux

By David Peterson
Minneapolis Star Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS — The city of Shakopee is backing away from its fight to stop the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community from widening the borders of its reservation by several hundred acres, a move the city described a year ago as a threat to its future as a rapidly growing suburb.

But it says it has achieved a concession: The federal government has pledged, from now on, to bring the city in as an active player any time the casino-enriched tribe tries to make a similar move.

"And that will happen again," Mayor John Schmitt said. "We're certain of it."

The dispute is over the tribe's desire to place some of its land -- a relatively recent acquisition of about 700 acres mostly in Shakopee -- into what is known as trust status. That makes it, effectively, part of a sovereign nation, removing it from the tax rolls and from zoning control by surrounding jurisdictions.

It was at best a somber City Council that dropped its dukes-up posture on Tuesday night and approved a tentative deal with the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), avoiding an expensive full-scale legal challenge at a time when the city faces a budget crunch severe enough to force staff cuts.

"We were forced to go this alone, financially, since our 'good neighbors,' Prior Lake and Scott County, decided to leave us hanging in the lurch," said Council Member Steve Clay. "They decided not to participate with us in this endeavor, and it's expensive. My impression is, this is probably the best result we can expect, given the time and expense we are willing to put into it."

Prior Lake has been forging a cooperative relationship with the tribe for some time now. The Scott County board made the same call a year ago on a 3-2 vote.

Both County Board members representing the tribe's closest neighbors had wanted to fight on. And some interpreted the results of this fall's elections for County Board as an expression of continued public unhappiness. The two candidates who took the most skeptical positions on the tribe were elected, and a candidate with family connections to the tribe was defeated.

Tribal officials had no immediate comment.

The tentative, seven-page agreement has a number of key elements that will make any future dispute of this kind more fair when it comes to the effect on the city, Schmitt said Wednesday.

"Basically, the BIA is now responsible for bringing [the tribe] to the table, giving us early notice, making us legally a party in anything that's being done, and lets us talk about 'cumulative effects'" on the city and not just its concerns over lost tax revenue, he said.

Specifically, he said:

- The BIA must alert the city within days of any future trust application -- a big change from what the city suspects has happened before, namely a lengthy period of behind-the-scenes activity before anything was unveiled.

- The BIA must ask the tribe to sit down with the city and talk things out. It doesn't have to, "but if they fail to participate, it becomes a matter of record that they are not willing to negotiate."

- The city gains the right to put on the table the messy particulars of a tribe's expansion in a fast-growing urban area in which expensive infrastructure such as sewer lines can become useless if certain key parcels disappear from the mix.

- The city gets a measure of reassurance that there is no intent to add more casinos onto any of the newly sovereign land.

City Administrator Mark McNeill told the council that he sees the agreement, which must still be ratified by the BIA, as "a good starting point for future cooperative efforts" among the BIA, the tribe and the city. "All parties benefit," he said.

Diabetes among American Indians targeted

By Onell R. Soto
San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — Fighting the diabetes problem was the focus of a conference in San Diego last week for about 200 health-care educators and other professionals working with young people at reservations around the West.

The basic message: Concentrate on getting kids to eat healthy foods and move more.

Diabetes is a particular concern with children.

Nationally, American Indians top the charts in childhood obesity and diabetes.

The same is true about obesity in San Diego County, where nearly a third of American Indians ages 5 to 19 were obese in 2004, compared with a quarter of the general population.

Reliable diabetes statistics for Indians locally are hard to come by.

But diabetes, particularly

Type 2, is linked to obesity, and that is preventable.

Preventing obesity can have lifelong benefits, said Dr. Dennis Styne, an expert on the issue and professor at the University of California Davis.

"Once you become obese, chronically obese, that's where the body wants to stay," he said.

On the food side of the equation, one of the biggest problems for many Indians who live in poverty is the bulk food handed out by the federal government -- highly processed and fatty food like cheese.

"It's possible to order better food," Styne said. "But apparently it isn't very easy."

At one of the reservations he works with, the Round Valley Indian Reservation 170 miles north of San Francisco, Rose Sita Francia helped plant a garden for vegetables that children cooked in the classroom.

She used it to explain that it's better to eat less processed and more whole foods.

And she also helped move the soda machines from in front of the tribe's community center.

"We can't drink sodas and expect to prevent diabetes," she said.

At the same time she worked on nutrition, fitness instructor and tribal member Eddie Whipple led children in exercise.

Francia said she has seen the results of her efforts in the attitudes of teens, who have become happier as they get more fit.

Teens are a particularly difficult population to reach, said Dr. Dan Calac, a Pauma tribal member who is the medical director of the Indian Health Council, based on the Rincon Indian Reservation.

"They're busy, they're really independent, the last thing they want to do is have a

physician look at them," said Calac, whose clinic works with a consortium of tribes in North County.

He hopes that recent efforts by tribes to build recreation facilities including ball fields, gyms and, on the Pala reservation, a skate park, will get kids to be more active.

"Fitness was part of the motivation," said Kilma Lattin, a Pala council member, who noted children on the reservation were some of the strongest lobbyists for the park, which opened a year ago.

"I personally have cousins that I've seen drop a lot of weight from skateboarding," Lattin said.

That's more difficult on reservations without thriving casinos, said Lisa Turner, a nutritionist and diabetes coordinator with the Southern Indian Health Council in Alpine.

Remote East County reser-

vations have no sidewalks, she said, and it's dangerous to ride a bicycle.

About 10 years ago, some of the kids got off-road skateboards with big, knobby tires.

"But the problem with that was rattlesnakes and wild animals," Turner said.

The council offers martial arts classes in Boulevard and has a treadmill and stationary bicycle to encourage exercise, and she has seen people lose weight.

She encourages healthy eating, but it's difficult to get fresh food when the nearest grocery store is 45 minutes away, so that's an ongoing battle.

Turner noted that obesity is a growing problem with children everywhere, but it's a particular issue on the reservations.

"What you hear echoed in the city certainly has much louder resonance out here," she said.

Taste of history



Andrew Marra/For Cox Newspapers

Matthew Wooten listens as a member of the Quilmes tribe explains the tribe's long history in Argentina.

New panel will negotiate gambling deal with tribe

By Dara Kam
Palm Beach Post

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — House Speaker Ray Sansom will announce his committee appointments today, including the creation of a committee to negotiate a gambling agreement with the Seminole Tribe of Florida that could send revenue to the state.

Sources close to Sansom

confirmed Monday that the select committee would be headed by Rep. Larry Cretul, R-Ocala, and that Rep. Bill Galvano, R-Bradenton, would be one of the committee's chief negotiators.

Gov. Charlie Crist reached an agreement with the Seminoles a year ago that allowed them to operate Las Vegas-style slot machines, as permitted under federal law,

and to conduct high-stakes card games such as blackjack and baccarat.

But the state Supreme Court ruled in July that Crist overreached his authority by changing state law because those card games are illegal elsewhere in Florida. That meant lawmakers had to sign off on the deal or craft a new one.

The tribe opened 104 new

blackjack and baccarat tables last month at the Hard Rock Casino and Hotel in Tampa.

The tribe already has paid the state \$60 million for the right to hold the games, and more than \$200 million is at stake over the next two years. That could be tough for some lawmakers to walk away from with growing budget deficits.

National heritage day honors American Indians

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — It may be a small step, but a day meant to honor American Indians' contributions acknowledges a history and culture that many say is often overlooked.

For the first time, federal legislation has set aside the day after Thanksgiving — for this year only — to honor American Indians in the United States. Few celebrations are planned this year, but backers say they hope to make the commemoration annual.

Frank Suniga of Salem, a descendent of Mescalero Apache Indians, said he and others began pushing in 2001 for a national day that recognizes his and other tribes' heritage.

"I thought, 'Why aren't we on the calendar — us Indians?'" Suniga said.

Suniga, 79, proposed his idea to a cultural committee that is part of the Portland-based Affiliated Tribes of

Northwest Indians. The organization took on the cause of a commemorative day, as did the National Congress of American Indians in Washington, D.C., and other groups.

Congress passed legislation this year designating the day as Native American Heritage Day, and President George W. Bush signed it last month.

The measure notes that more Americans Indians than any other group, per capita, serve in the U.S. military. It also cites tribes' artistic, musical and agricultural contributions.

"The Indians kept the Pilgrims alive with turkeys and wild game," Suniga said. "That's the reason it was attached to the Thanksgiving weekend."

After the Thanksgiving weekend, Suniga said, he and other advocates plan to lobby to place the Native

American Heritage Day on the nation's calendar annually.

Both the Portland and D.C.-based organizations said they would support an annual commemorative day. It isn't certain, however, that all tribes would agree the fourth Friday in November is best day to recognize their contributions and traditions.

"The question is should it be the day after Thanksgiving," said Joe Garcia, director of the National Congress of American Indians. "Thanksgiving is controversial to some people."

The holiday, which has its roots in Massachusetts, marks a 1621 feast in which English settlers and Wampanoag Indians celebrated and gave thanks for their harvest, but it was followed by centuries of battles and tense relations between the United States and tribes.

Recognizing American Indians the day after Thanksgiving, the Native American Heritage Day Act of 2008 says, emphasizes the nation's relationship with tribes now.

"I think the recognition is important," Garcia said, "and the most important thing it does is give a little more perspective from the American Indian side."

Cleora Hill-Scott, executive director of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, agrees. But she also said that because the Native American Heritage Day law was passed last month, few — if any — tribes in the region have planned events to commemorate the day.

"What's difficult is this day is going to come and go without much being done," Hill-Scott said. "It's a baby step in the right direction."

Elwha casino opening delayed

By Jim Casey
Peninsula Daily News

PORT ANGELES, Wash. — Christmas revelers won't be able to play the slots at the Lower Elwha Klallam tribal reservation.

Problems getting electrical power to a new casino near the southern end of Stratton Road south of the tribal center have delayed its anticipated holiday start.

It now is scheduled to open in mid- or late January, Sonya Tetnowski, tribal executive director, said Friday.

Meanwhile, the 7,000-square-foot building has been roofed, glazed and painted a soft yellow, and parking places have been paved.

The \$4 million building will have 100 bingo-style electronic slots that will accept amounts starting with pennies, tribal officials said when they announced the casino project in August.

It also will have a deli but will not serve alcohol, said Tribal Chairwoman Frances Charles.

As befits a gambling operation, the casino represents a hedged bet.

Should it prove unsuccessful -- or if the tribe follows its plan to open a larger casino on U.S. Highway 101 west of Port Angeles -- the building is designed eventually to house other tribal offices.

It will be the second tribal casino on the North Olympic Peninsula, the first being the much larger 7 Cedars Casino of the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe in Blyn.

Unlike 7 Cedars, which as a Class 2 casino is supervised by the state of Washington, the Class 3 operation of the Lower Elwha will be overseen by the federal government through the National Indian Gaming Commission.