



LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY BANDS OF ODAWA INDIANS  
7500 ODAWA CIRCLE, HARBOR SPRINGS, MI 49740

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**TRIBAL COUNCIL TRAVEL REPORT NARRATIVE**

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From: Councilor Winnay J. Wemigwase

Date: March 6, 2012

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Re: 26<sup>th</sup> Annual RES 2012 Conference & Falmouth Training

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I am a strong proponent of diversifying our economic activity and finding new ways to generate funds for our people. Because of this belief, I want to become knowledgeable about what is “out there” for us in Indian Country and beyond. I was told that the annual Reservation Economic Summit and American Indian Business Trade Fair (RES 2012) is one of the best gatherings to attend to see what is happening in business and for networking with other tribes and entities on business ventures. RES 2012 is put on by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development. They not only had the usual general and break-out sessions, they also had special interest sessions that focused on policy, law and legislation.

For example, I attended a special interest session on the federal, Native 8(a) program and process. I am trying to learn more about this topic, and the session was very informative. I feel I still have a lot to learn about this particular program, but it was a great introduction for me into the current issues this program faces and how legislators are trying to change it. The proposed changes would not be good for tribes, and it was good to see that there are lobbyists that are working hard to educate those on Capitol Hill in order to keep this program as is. However, I do agree with one of the criticisms of the program. Legislators are concerned about how large contracting companies are being used to complete projects under the Native 8(a) Program, which is a program for small Native businesses. It’s as though the small native and tribal businesses are being used as fronts for large government contractors. I do not agree with this, and I hope that it is not as prevalent as some legislators say. Hopefully, a compromise can be made and any deficiencies can be remedied.

Another stand-out addition to this conference in comparison to other conferences was the creation of

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two different areas for networking, buying and showcasing goods and services. One large ballroom housed a Trade Fair and, in another ballroom, there was a separate Indian Art Market. The RES 2012 Trade Fair served as an arena for Native businesses, entrepreneurs, tribes, organizations and conference attendees to engage in networking. To me, it resembled a large-scale “college fair” where reps at their booths were ready to talk to any and all passersby. In this same room, a tribal business presentation contest was held where tribal businesses and native entrepreneurs were given two or six minutes to pitch a new business idea to a panel from NCAIED. I loved this idea! Simultaneously, the Indian Art Market was taking place in another ballroom. The Art Market served as a place for Native artists and crafts people to display and sell their creations. I was very impressed with how these two aspects of the conference were handled. One location centered on networking, and the other location centered on, basically, shopping.

One more example of a break-out session, that I thought was exceptional, dealt with “Native-to-Native Procurement.” There were three panelists who each took a turn talking about their experience with this type of collaboration among native businesses. Two points that were made have really stuck with me. The first point was that it can be very difficult to find native vendors that can compete with non-native vendors due to their typically small size and capacity. This problem has never really occurred to me. The other point was made by Panelist Mr. Ernie Stevens, Jr., Chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association. He said that one thing that native businesses need to realize and remember is that if they are chosen to provide services to another tribe, they must do so with the highest level of professionalism and follow-through. He said that native businesses shouldn’t assume that they are entitled to a job or win a bid just because they’re Indian. Everyone has to demand excellence and work with vendors that are in the best interest of their tribes.

Overall, this conference was an awesome introduction for me into what is currently happening in Indian Country in regards to business and economic development. I feel so fortunate to have been given the opportunity to attend this inspirational event. I am looking forward to bringing some of the ideas and information I collected to Tribal Council in our efforts to diversify our own economic endeavors.

Since I was going to be arriving in Las Vegas on Sunday, February 26, and I wanted to make the most of my time there, I also registered for a Falmouth Training scheduled for Monday, February 27th and Tuesday, February 28th titled, “Strategic Planning for Tribes and Tribal Organizations.” The training took place at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. both days. I have had experiences with strategic planning before; helping to create the strategic plan for what was the LTBB Education Department and for the early stages of the LTBB Language Program. But, it has been quite some time since I participated in those planning sessions. Therefore, I have been looking for training that would update my knowledge and assist me in learning how to conduct strategic planning sessions. This was an excellent experience for several reasons. I liked the fact that the concept of strategic planning was presented with an emphasis on the unique needs of tribes, Native organizations and those looking to secure or manage grants. Approximately two-thirds of the class was taught in a lecture format with PowerPoint slides. The remaining third consisted of small group activities and simulations. We were also given a book to take with us, “Strategic Planning for Non-Profit Organizations,” that served as an additional “text book” with paginated references shown on the PowerPoint slides and notes. We learned about the entire strategic planning process from creating a mission statement to solidifying objectives and then to evaluating the effectiveness and adherence to the plan. All of this was taught with special attention to how the “tribal or Native” strategic planning process needs to/should differ from non-native organizations and entities in order to be a successful tool for our communities. All in all, the decision to add on this learning opportunity proved to be a great one. I hope to be able to share what I learned with others in our community and continue to hone my skills in teaching, presenting and facilitating for not only my benefit, but for the Tribe as well.