

## Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community Celebrates 40 Years as a Federally Recognized Indian Tribe

On November 28, 1969, Community members of the Shakopee Mdewakanton were granted federal recognition by the United States government. Over the last 40 years the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community has been transformed from an economically distressed reservation to one of the most economically successful Indian tribes in the United States.

“We have been most fortunate in recent years as our Community has grown and changed into what it is today. Our children have health care, nice homes, and educational opportunities that we could only dream of when my generation was growing up. We have a level of self-sufficiency that didn’t seem possible 40 years ago,” said SMSC Chairman Stanley R. Crooks.

### Before Federal Recognition

The members of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community descend from the Mdewakanton band of the Dakota (or Sioux) Nation; the Mdewakanton are one of the seven original bands of the Dakota Nation. The Eastern Dakota bands – the Mdewakanton, Wahpekute, Sisseton, and Wahpeton – are often referred to as the Mississippi Sioux. In English the name “Mdewakanton” means “Dwellers of Spirit Lake.” For many generations the Mdewakanton Dakota lived on a vast territory of lands throughout present-day Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Dakota. The Mdewakanton are particularly associated with the Minnesota River Valley, and today the tribe’s reservation and trust lands are located near the site of the village known as “Thintathunwan,” which is associated with the Mdewakanton leader Sakpe [shock-pay], which means the number “six” and is the origin of the town named Shakopee. By virtue of its government-to-government dealings with the federal government in numerous treaties dating back to 1805, the Mdewakanton band was eventually dispossessed of at least 30 million acres of land.

Located in what was then a completely rural area some 35 miles southwest of Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Prior Lake Indian Reservation lands consisted of a mere 258 acres. Four tracts of land containing this acreage was purchased and set aside for the use of the Mdewakanton by the United States Congress in appropriation acts from the late 1880s and early 1890s. Over time, the Mdewakanton Dakota families who received assignments for use of these lands struggled with poor living conditions and economic hardship.

### Federal Recognition

After receiving federal recognition in 1969, the Charter Members of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community began the difficult process of creating a government and economic system that would provide for its members and the future of this small tribe on its small land base. The struggle



L-R: Secretary/Treasurer Keith B. Anderson, Chairman Stanley R. Crooks, Vice-Chairman Glynn A. Crooks.

for economic security was difficult, and there were many obstacles. At that time, life for the members of the SMSC was like that found on many other reservations. Deficient government policies had resulted in inadequate housing, limited infrastructure, lack of employment opportunity, and few prospects for a better future. During the early 1970s, tribal members depended on commodities and low paying jobs away from the reservation were the norm. Through a number of tribal initiatives, members managed to get a small community building built and create a health care program, a childcare facility, and a home improvement program, all bringing about some positive changes to life on the 258-acre reservation. A number of tribal enterprise opportunities came and went.

### Gaming Comes to the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community

Then in the 1980s life changed dramatically forever. Shakopee Mdewakanton Tribal Chairman Norman Crooks, the SMSC’s first Chairman, and other tribal members learned about the success of the Seminole Tribe’s high-stakes bingo operation in Florida. They saw the opportunity and, with the determination and perseverance of tribal members, the dream was realized.

Little Six Bingo Palace opened on the SMSC’s reservation on October 16, 1982. The only way onto the reservation and to the new bingo hall was on a gravel road. Busloads of people traveled the rough, dusty road to the bingo hall, and instantly, gaming was a success like no other. The tribal sovereignty that allowed high stakes bingo to operate, along with a fortunate location near a major metropolitan area, suddenly pushed this small tribe into the spotlight as a primary entertainment destination in the Twin Cities and throughout the region.

In 1984, video slots were added at Little Six Casino. In 1992,

# 40 years

the tribe's new enterprise, Mystic Lake Casino, a much larger state of the art gaming facility, opened with video slot machines and blackjack. During the 1990s through the present under Chairman Stanley R. Crooks, son of Chairman Norman Crooks, the SMSC continued its transformation from an economically distressed reservation to one of the more economically successful Indian tribes in the United States. In this new era of tribal self-sufficiency, the tribe was able to use its inherent sovereign rights and growing economy to purchase additional lands and to radically improve its economic base.

Diversification of the tribal economy was made a priority with the opening of Dakota! Sport and Fitness, the Shakopee Dakota Convenience Store, Dakota Mall, Playworks, Dakota Meadows RV Park, and adding the hotel to the casino complex.

All through the 1990s the infrastructure of the Community went through major improvements, with new sewer, water, and roads. New subdivisions offered major changes in housing for Community members. The natural surroundings were improved with tree plantings and wetland restorations.

## In a New Century

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community continues its growth. Since the year 2000, the SMSC has built Tiowakan Spiritual Center, Dakota Meadows Mini Storage, Playworks LINK Event Center, The Meadows at Mystic Lake, opened a second Shakopee Dakota Convenience Store, and the Mystic Lake Store at Mall of America.

At the gaming enterprise, two hotel towers, parking decks, new restaurants, a new entertainment center, and a bingo hall have opened. On December 13, 2007, a new Little Six Casino opened at the site of the original bingo hall.

The SMSC developed Mdewakanton Emergency Services, a full-time, professional fire and ambulance department staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The department responds to approximately 200 emergency calls and transports an average of 60 patients each month. It also provides mutual aid to area departments upon request.

A Water Reclamation Facility (WRF) utilizing European technology to treat wastewater for reuse as irrigation opened in 2006. Biosolids are used as fertilizer. The WRF also has one of the largest green roofs in the Midwest, which reduces energy costs and consumption, prolongs the life of the roof, and treats storm water. A 1,000,000-gallon water tower was built to better serve the Community. A second water treatment facility and another water tower were constructed on the northern portion of the Community.

As a positive expression of tribal sovereignty, in July 2008 the SMSC opened a bottling facility on the reservation to bottle water for use in tribal enterprises and special events. The plant also produces plastic bottles in various sizes from preformed plastic. In early 2009, a reverse osmosis facility was added to provide enhanced water treatment by eliminating the need for water softeners in Community enterprises and homes.



Mystic Lake Casino Hotel

In October 2008 a second sheet of ice opened at Dakota! Sport and Fitness. Dakota! Ice Center is home ice for the Prior Lake High School Girls' and Boys' Hockey Teams as well as the Prior Lake/Savage Hockey Association. Dakota! also offers hockey and figure skating lessons and open skate sessions.

## Taking Care of the Earth

As a steward of the earth, the SMSC conducts a number of activities to preserve and protect the land for future generations. Existing buildings are being "greened" up while new construction projects are "green" from the ground up. Energy initiatives are underway to reduce some of the environmental impacts associated with conventional energy sources and to increase tribal sovereignty.

The SMSC is a partner in Koda Energy, a joint venture with Rahr Malting of Shakopee, which produces heat and electricity by burning agricultural by-products and other biomass such as wood, prairie grasses, and oat hulls from General Mills cereals like Cheerios. A 386-foot, 1.5-megawatt wind turbine at the SMSC Pow Wow Grounds became operational in 2009. Combined, the wind turbine and Koda Energy have the potential to generate more than enough electricity to power the entire reservation.

Another innovative project now converts the Community's waste motor oil to heat buildings. Previously, waste oil was hauled away, but now some Community spaces are partially heated by waste oil which reduces the use of natural gas. Another project converts 18,000 gallons of waste vegetable oil from deep fat fryers each year from Community restaurants into bio-diesel for use in vehicles and equipment.

Solar energy is also utilized. A total of twelve skylights and 22 solar panels reduce energy consumption at the SMSC's fire

station and the second ice arena at Dakotah! Sport and Fitness. This new ice arena contains a 32,648 sq. ft. green roof to treat storm water. The facility also has a compressor system and heat exchanger to take the waste heat from the ice-making equipment and redirect it through the bleachers to heat the seating area. These initiatives all result in energy savings over the long-term.

Environmental specialists are active in restoring and managing wetlands, forests, and prairies. Inventories of existing natural communities, both floral and faunal, are in production. More than 500 acres of former farmland has been restored to native prairie and wetlands. Hydrologists assess water quality and plan and implement projects to improve water bodies on the reservation.

### **Additional Services Offered**

The success of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community's enterprises has allowed the Community to create and provide numerous education, health, and social service programs for Community members, staff, and Native Americans in Scott County. The SMSC provides health and dental clinics, a pharmacy, a wellness center containing a physical therapy and chiropractic care clinic, and a vision clinic. The Mystic Clinic provides urgent care services to team members of the SMSC Gaming Enterprise.

The SMSC has a mobile unit, which not only houses facilities for mammography and cancer screening, but also amenities so that it can function as an incident command center in the event of a major emergency or disaster.

During its first year of service, hundreds of patients received health screenings and services from the mobile unit across the state. Additional services include dental, diabetes, and lead screening clinics. Each month mammograms are provided at no charge for tribal members and employees using the mobile unit. In 2009 the SMSC and Scott County began working together to provide free walk-in health clinics using the Mobile Unit at locations throughout the county for uninsured and underinsured residents.

### **Economic Impact Substantial**

Evidence of the huge economic impact of the Community's enterprises can also be seen in other areas. The SMSC is proud to be a leader in sharing its success with other tribes and organizations by making charitable donations. From 1997 through 2009 the SMSC donated more than \$162 million to schools, youth programs, charitable organizations, and Indian tribes.

The Mdewakanton LIFE Program has donated more than 500 Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) to organizations including the Minnesota State Patrol, other rescue and law enforcement programs, charitable groups, and schools.

From 2007 through 2009 the SMSC donated \$14.5 million to the University of Minnesota for scholarships and the new TCF Bank Stadium. The gift funded the Minnesota Tribal Nations Plaza at the stadium to exhibit and celebrate the history, presence, and cultural contributions of all eleven Indian tribes in Minnesota. The remainder of the donation went into a matching endowment fund, creating a \$5 million endowment to provide scholarships for students.

As the largest employer in Scott County, the SMSC provides much needed jobs for more than 4,100 people. Millions of dollars are pumped into the area's economy each year as a result of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community's successful economic enterprises.

Today, Mystic Lake Casino Hotel is known as one of the largest and most successful Indian-owned casinos in the United States and is one of the largest tourist attractions in the Upper Midwest. It is in the forefront of gaming technology and is a leader in the hospitality industry.

The SMSC engages in a variety of cultural activities which help educate the general public about Indian people. The tribe not only honors its ancestors by continuing Dakota traditions, but also by demonstrating that Dakota people are thriving in the modern world. In addition to their annual Wacipi (Pow Wow) and dance exhibition at the Mall of America, the tribe works to preserve cultural sites. Children and adults are learning the Dakota language, song, and dance. Each year tribal youth celebrate Dakota heritage with Young Native Pride, a free event open to the public, which celebrates American Indian culture, traditions, and spirituality through song and dance. A cultural center is planned to display many of the thousands of items in the tribal archival collection.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota are proud of their accomplishments and honor their ancestors, for it is because of their strong sense of survival and pride in being Dakota, that they have the ability to prosper today.

### **Looking Toward the Future**

"Through the actions and hard work of our members in the early days and continuing over the last 40 years, our children and grandchildren, and even great grandchildren, will have a home here on the reservation where they can live out their lives surrounded by their loved ones. We are now able to provide for the needs of our members like never before," Chairman Crooks said. "This land, our tribal land, is actively being preserved as a homeland for future generations." He continued, "Our hope is that future generations will be proud to be Shakopee Mdewakanton, that they will no longer have to fight to have their land put into trust, and that other governments will finally accept that we are a sovereign nation, a government that takes care of its people and its own land. We provide our own health care, educational services, and emergency services. We pave and plow our streets and put in subdivisions. We generate our own energy and treat and bottle our own water. We are self-sufficient as a sovereign nation, like we were before the Europeans came to this area hundreds of years ago."

A private event was held in November to commemorate the 40-year anniversary of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community at Mystic Lake Casino Hotel. All eight former chairmen and the current chairman were honored and received star quilts. ♣

*For more information about about the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, visit [www.shakopeedakota.org](http://www.shakopeedakota.org).*