

# E · X · P · R · E · S · S · I · O · N · S

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American Indians stress traditional tobacco use:

## DIW youth to urge city parks to ban smoking

Picking up dirty cigarette butts isn't glamorous but stuffed in jars, they make a point.

A group of American Indian youth in Minneapolis spent the summer and fall collecting used cigarette butts from city parks. They crammed the evidence into large bulk jars and in spring 2009 those jars will head to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board where the teens will make a pitch to ban smoking in all city parks.

The effort is part of the Division of Indian Work's Reduce Tobacco Abuse Program. Tobacco holds a sacred and spiritual place in the American Indian culture. It is used for prayer, offerings, gift giving, cleansing, and medicine. But today, tobacco use is commercial and habitual, making it the most preventable leading cause of death in the United States. This Division of Indian Work (DIW) program works to keep American Indian youth from smoking and teaches the traditional Native uses of tobacco.

"These students have done all the work and they were surprised at how much cigarette litter there was in the parks. Our youth are learning that tobacco was not meant to be used this way — not in our culture," said George Spears, coordinator for the Reduce Tobacco Abuse Program. The DIW youth are working with the Tobacco-Free Youth Recreation initiative in Minnesota, as well as other youth groups.

Another component of the program involves an American Indian youth running group. The group runs a mile together each week and mixes in cultural lessons. The group begins each run with a tobacco offering/prayer and then places cedar in their shoes to protect them from injury.

At Minnehaha Park this summer the group tried their hand at delivering important messages the way their ancestors did long ago — by foot. In the re-enactment, one tribe tries to send a message to another via a single message carrier who must run long distances to deliver it. Along the way, the message carrier had to avoid animals, the elements, and enemy tribes to get the message to the intended receiver. One youth in the group acted as the message carrier, one the receiver, and the rest as animals, the elements, and enemies trying to disrupt the delivery of the message. The exercise hit home.

"We only had to run a short distance," said one winded teen. "I don't know how they did it on foot with all the things that could get in their way."



A teen with the Division of Indian Work picked up cigarette butt litter at East Phillips Park in Minneapolis. The youth in DIW's Reduce Tobacco Abuse Program spent the summer and fall collecting cigarette litter from parks. They plan to ask city officials to ban smoking in city parks.



## Celebrating culture

The West African community in Minnesota held a Cultural Awareness and Family Day in September to showcase the diversity of West African countries. It included fashion shows, cultural dance and other performances, food displays, and exhibits of cultural artifacts. **Above:** A group from Togo sing and dance.

The event was sponsored, in part, by the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches' Center for Families which offers services such as job training, health screenings, mental health services, help with locating housing, and much more. It welcomes all families, especially the growing number of immigrant families from West Africa.

## Demand spikes, Minn. economy leaves food shelves scrambling

It's not an official economic indicator, but maybe it ought to be.

Minnesota's food shelves are seeing overwhelming demand from families who need help. In the 41 counties of central and southwestern Minnesota (including the Twin Cities metro area) food shelves have seen demand jump 13 percent from last year.

And donations? They are not keeping pace. This snapshot, from food shelf monthly data collections, looks at the first six months of 2008 compared to the first six months of 2007.

"Those numbers don't even take into account this fall, when the economic news worsened," said Barbara Thell, director of Minnesota FoodShare "We're worried. A lot is riding on our upcoming March Campaign and we know it."

Each March, FoodShare directs the largest food drive in the state (known as the March Campaign) and restocks about 300 food shelves across Minnesota. Half of all the groceries distributed at Minnesota food shelves each year are generated by the March Campaign.

The number of families needing Minnesota food shelves has increased some from year to year, but a 13 percent jump in one year is "rare and alarming," Thell said.

Minnesota's lackluster economy is evident. The state's unemployment rate, 6.2 percent, is at a 25-year high and higher than the national rate. The price of gas and groceries is rising faster than wages. More families are facing home foreclosure — 28,000 projected in Minnesota in 2008, a 39 percent jump in one year. And the stock market beating and credit sector crisis are triggering more than just increased anxiety. Fixed-income retirees are losing wealth exactly when they can't afford to. Small businesses and families are losing cash flow. And many are just plain losing hope.

In food shelves outside the 41 central/southwestern Minnesota counties, data is still being analyzed, but the outlook doesn't look much better. "We are stretched to the max," said Judy Bickel, program director of the Northfield Community Action Center which operates that community's food shelf. Northfield's food shelf has seen a 17 percent jump in the number of families served from August 2007 to August 2008.

"We are seeing many first-time families and families who used to use our services but haven't had to for a long, long time. A significant portion of our community needs our help," said Wanda Wright, Northfield's food shelf manager.



DD and Rose Marie Davison visit the local food shelf in Northfield. Once food shelf volunteers, this couple now needs its help. And they are not alone. Northfield's food shelf has seen a 17 percent jump in families needing help over the last year.

## Wanted: HandyWorks snow shovelers

**HandyWorks** With a Minnesota winter just around the corner, HandyWorks is recruiting both paid and volunteer workers to shovel snow for seniors living in South, Southeast, and Northeast Minneapolis.

HandyWorks helps seniors keep up their homes by matching them with others who can help with house-keeping, minor home repairs, and outdoor chores. Workers complete chores such as snow removal, lawn mowing, laundry, and housecleaning.

Unfortunately, the population of seniors who need household help is increasing faster than either paid or volunteer workers can be found. The end result is a growing waiting list of people who need help. Paid snow removal workers earn \$15 an hour and must have their own reliable transportation. HandyWorks would especially like to appeal to church youth and social justice groups looking for a valuable volunteer opportunity.

In addition to a call for volunteers, HandyWorks is looking for donated snow blowers in good working condition. And — as always — HandyWorks encourages everyone to look out for their elderly neighbors who may need help this winter.

For more information, call Megan Nolan-Elliasen at 612-721-8687, ext. 329, or reach her via e-mail at [mnolan@gmcc.org](mailto:mnolan@gmcc.org). To learn more about HandyWorks, visit [www.gmcc.org/handyworks](http://www.gmcc.org/handyworks).

## DIW Holiday Appeal

The holiday season is nearly upon us. With your help, low-income and working-poor American Indian families can have a happy holiday season.

Preparations are under way for the annual Division of Indian Work (DIW) Holiday Appeal, and help is needed. The community-wide event recruits individuals, congregations, businesses, and community organizations to help collect thousands of pounds of food and children's Christmas gifts. Each year, the appeal helps about 1,000 families with a holiday meal and nearly 350 families with Christmas toys and winter clothing.

The Division of Indian Work will distribute the holiday food from its building at 1001 East Lake St. in Minneapolis. Thanksgiving donations must arrive by Friday, Nov. 21, and Christmas donations must arrive by Friday, Dec. 12.

This year, DIW is requesting cash donations to buy fresh holiday poultry, fruit, and candy. It is also seeking donations of shelf-stable foods such as dressing or stuffing mix, instant mashed potatoes, pie crust mix, Jello, evaporated milk, and canned goods such as vegetables, fruit, and pie filling (apple or cherry). Christmas gifts for teens and children also are being collected. Some ideas include hats, mittens, toys, CDs, radios, hair products, and jewelry.

Native families living in the Twin Cities are more likely than any other cultural group to struggle with unemployment. Half of the American Indian children here live in poverty.

For more information, contact Maren Hardy, DIW food shelf manager at 612-722-8722, ext. 343, or e-mail her at [mhardy@gmcc.org](mailto:mhardy@gmcc.org).



Volunteers ready food for the DIW Holiday Appeal.

## Snapshot: DIW summer youth activities



Outings such as pottery classes, nature hikes, and canoeing filled the summer of the American Indian boys and girls in the Division of Indian Work's Youth Leadership Development Program. **Above:** Using a net, students catch a turtle for an up-close look during a visit to Richardson Nature Center. **Left and below:** Powderhorn Park donated pottery-making classes to the students who enjoyed the mess and their creations.



## EXPRESSIONS

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