

# National and State News



## Indigenous Peoples Task Force Celebrates 20th Anniversary



Sharon Day had the crowd laughing as she shared family stories at the IPTF celebration at Mystic Lake. From left to right Beverly Steel, Cecilia Gonier, Doris Isham, Stan Day, Sharon Day and Kevin Leecy.

On October 11, family and friends of Sharon Day and the Indigenous Peoples Task Force gathered at Mystic Lake to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Task Force that Sharon founded and continues to lead. Her aunt Cecilia Gonier, brother Stan Day, cousins Beverly "Mitz" Steel and Doris Isham, and Tribal Chair Kevin Leecy traveled to the cities to honor Sharon

During the celebration, Sharon acknowledged the support of her family and the people of Bois Forte. Chairman

Leecy called her family to the front of the auditorium as he honored Sharon on behalf of the Band and the family presented her with a blanket from Bois Forte.

Here is a description, in Sharon's own words of the work of the Indigenous Peoples Task Force:

*Twenty years ago, a small group of people became concerned about HIV/AIDS and how this illness might affect our community. We knew that*

*already there were Native people infected with this virus and there were no services for them. And so it began. Twenty years later, the Task Force is still growing and reacting to the latest health threats that we are facing today. We continue to provide prevention, counseling and testing for HIV, case management services and housing to prevent the spread of HIV among our people.*

*Today, we are also providing a number of research activities including a*

*culturally specific smoking cessation model for Native women. Our efforts to increase traditional tobacco use and decrease the use of commercial tobacco has led us down many roads. We are pleased to have gifted traditional tobacco seeds to many people. We have our natural tobacco plants growing in Utah, California, Oklahoma, Michigan, and many reservations and communities in Minnesota. We have worked with environmental activists to encourage recycling and we have worked with women and men to save the water.*

*I am also proud to say the Ojitchidag Gikinewamagaad Peer Education Program continues today. We began this theater program for adolescents in 1990 with a small grant of \$15,000 from the Otto Bremer Foundation. Seventeen years later, this program continues today having served over 1,500 adolescents. These youth actors have brought their theatrical messages regarding HIV prevention, alcohol and drug prevention, and smoking prevention, to over 100 tribes in the United States and Canada.*

Mii gwetch.

## AIM Leader Vernon Bellecourt passes

Vernon Bellecourt, who fought against the use of Indian nicknames for sports teams as a longtime leader of the American Indian Movement, has died at age 75.

Bellecourt died Saturday at Abbott Northwestern Hospital of complications from pneumonia, said his brother, Clyde Bellecourt, a founding member of the militant American Indian rights group.

Just before he was put on a respirator, Vernon Bellecourt joked that the CIA had finally gotten him, his brother said.

"He was willing to put his butt on the line to draw attention to racism in sports," his brother said.

Vernon Bellecourt \_ whose Objibwe name WaBun-Inini means Man of Dawn \_ was a member of Minnesota's White Earth band and was an international spokesman for the AIM Grand Governing Council based in Minneapolis.

Clyde Bellecourt helped found AIM as a militant group in 1968 and Vernon Bellecourt soon became involved, taking part in the 1973 occupation of the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. He was present only briefly during the 71-day standoff with federal agents, serving mostly as a spokesman and fundraiser, Clyde Bellecourt said.

He was active in the campaign to free AIM activist Leonard Peltier, who was convicted of killing two FBI agents during a shootout in 1975 on the Pine Ridge reservation.

He was also involved as a negotiator in AIM's 1972 occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs headquarters in Washington as part of the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan.

In recent years, Bellecourt had been active in the fight against American Indian nicknames for sports teams as president of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media.

He was arrested in Cleveland during the 1997 World Series and again in 1998 during protests against the Cleveland Indians' mascot, Chief Wahoo. Charges were dropped the first time and he was never charged in the second case.

After Wounded Knee, Vernon Bellecourt became a leader of AIM's work abroad, meeting with presidents such as Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, his brother said. He said they plan to list them as honorary pallbearers.

Clyde Bellecourt said his brother had been in Venezuela about four weeks ago to meet with President Hugo Chavez to discuss Chavez' program for providing heating assistance to American Indian tribes. He fell ill around the time of his return, Clyde Bellecourt said.

*Reprinted from Minneapolis Tribune – Associated Press story*

## Canada, US, two others votes 'no' as UN Native Rights declaration passes

The international community has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, despite high-profile opposition from Canada and three other countries.

The non-binding declaration, which sets out global human rights standards for indigenous populations, was easily approved Thursday by the UN General Assembly in New York — with only Canada, New Zealand, the United States and Australia dissenting. Eleven countries abstained.

In his address to the General Assembly before the vote, Canada's UN ambassador, John McNee, said Canada had "significant concerns" over the declaration's wording on provisions addressing lands and resources, as well as another article calling on states to obtain prior informed consent with indigenous groups before enacting new laws or administrative measures.

Article 26 of the UN declaration states: "Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired."

McNee said the provision is "overly broad, unclear and capable of a wide variety of interpretations" that could lead to the reopening of previously settled land claims and existing treaties.