Indigenous Peoples Task Force

October 28, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sharon M. Day to Retire as Executive Director of Indigenous Peoples Task Force After 36 Years of Leadership

Minneapolis, MN: The Indigenous Peoples Task Force (IPTF) announces the retirement of Sharon M. Day, an enrolled member of the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe, who has served as Executive Director since May 1990. Her more than three decades of leadership shaped the organization from its earliest days into a vital pillar of the Native community in South Minneapolis and beyond.

Sharon is among the founders of IPTF. In 1987, after discovering the near-total absence of HIV education and prevention resources for American Indians in the Twin Cities, she and a small group of community members created the organization, then known as the Minnesota American Indian AIDS Task Force. What began with no funding and no services for Indigenous people affected by HIV grew, under Sharon's leadership, into a comprehensive organization addressing health, housing, culture, and youth development for the urban Indian community.

Today, IPTF offers HIV/HCV prevention and care, harm reduction services, supported housing at Mandoowahdak Odena, traditional food and language programming for youth at the Teaching Garden, and Return to First Medicines, a commercial tobacco prevention initiative.

Sharon has described her vision for the organization simply: IPTF exists to be a genuinely cultural agency, not an imitation of mainstream service providers. Her approach was to weave the seven Ojibwe teachings (kindness, honesty, humility, courage, generosity, respect, and truth) into every program, so that services would be about, as she has put it, "truly healing as opposed to putting a band-aid on a symptom."

Of her many contributions to IPTF, Sharon is especially proud of the Youth Theater Program, now the Ikidowin Acting Ensemble, which she created in 1990 in partnership with Spiderwoman Theater. "We knew nothing about theater," she has said. "We just knew that storytelling was an important part of our culture." Sharon traveled to 27 states performing with the youth she mentored, several of whom now work in public health, the arts, and community leadership.

Sharon's tenure closes on a high note: in July 2026, IPTF officially opened the Mikwanedun Audisookon Center ("remember our teachings" in Ojibwe), a 12,350-square-foot, $12 million urban sanctuary in the Phillips neighborhood built with Indigenous-based construction materials and renewable energy systems. The center brings IPTF's health, housing, arts, and theater programming together under one roof for the first time, fulfilling a goal Sharon championed for much of her tenure.

Beyond IPTF, Sharon is a water protector and Midewiwin member who regards caring for water as a spiritual duty. Following the M'dewin teachings and the tutelage of Josephine Mandamin, she has led more than 23 Nibi (Water) Walks along the Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Minnesota Rivers, offering every step as a prayer.

Sharon's work has earned wide recognition, including the Red Ribbon Award from the National Native American AIDS Prevention Resource Center, CURE's 2017 RiverKeeper award, the Gisela Konopka Award, the Alston Bannerman Sabbatical Award, and a Spirit Aligned Legacy Fellowship. On November 10, 1998, the Governor of Minnesota and the mayors of both St. Paul and Minneapolis proclaimed "Sharon M. Day Day" in her honor.

Sharon is also an accomplished artist, musician, and writer who has performed at the Guthrie Theater, the Ordway, and the Kennedy Center, written plays for Ikidowin and Twin Cities theaters, and won national awards for her soft sculpture. In February 2025, the Southwest Two Spirit Society honored Sharon for her lifetime of activism, writing, and leadership supporting Indigenous peoples, women, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

"Sharon's vision has guided this organization since before it had a name," said Susan Allen, IPTF Board President. "She built IPTF program by program, generation by generation, always led by culture and by love for our community. Her legacy will carry us forward for many years to come."

Sharon's retirement as Executive Director takes effect on November 1, 2026. She will continue with IPTF part-time on special projects, including Ikidowin, the Water Walks, and public policy work, and is happy to turn the reins of administration over to Suzanne Nash.

Media Contact:

Emily Jarret Hughes, emilyj@indigenouspeoplestf.org.
(612) 314-5413
2313 13th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55404

###