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Walking Shield brings improvements to Red Cliff

The Daily Press
Last Updated: Friday, March 14th, 2003 12:05:24 PM

By BARBARA BROWN MEREDITH

The County Journal

RED CLIFF — The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa are progressing step by step towards economic growth and community development.

Red Cliff Tribal Chairman Raymond DePerry and tribal planner Wayne Lindemans recently met with representatives from the Walking Shield

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American Indian Society to continue crafting a partnership which will result in new housing, road construction and health care benefits for the Red Cliff Reservation.

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The goals identified in Phase One of Red Cliff Operation Walking Shield are:

- Construct five miles of new roads for a new housing subdivision.
- Install five miles of new water line infrastructure for housing subdivision.
- Install five miles of new sewer line infrastructure for housing subdivision.
- Build four new 1300 square foot houses for ownership by tribal members.
- Construct an 18-site pre-manufactured home park.
- Provide dental, optometry, and audiology services to community members.

According to Lindemans, Walking Shield is a non-profit organization founded by a contractor and enrolled Lakota Sioux member, who returned to his home reservation and was astonished at the magnitude of pervasive poverty and living conditions he observed.

"Drawing on his experience with the Department of Defense, he recognized that the severe needs and conditions faced by emerging tribal nations are similar to those faced by other third-world countries that the U.S. military construction and medical units use for Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) deployment exercises," Lindemans reported.

"The Walking Shield American Society links military construction and medical units facing IRT requirements with economically distressed Indian nations to provide construction, medical, dental, humanitarian, and nation-building services."

DePerry and Lindemans said the projects Walking Shield has determined they can complete for the reservation are scheduled to begin sometime between May 15 and June 1, 2004 based upon federal appropriations. The labor for the projects will be completed by military reservists in rotating two-week units.

"Walking Shield projects are a secondary mission for the Department of Defense. National defense is their primary function which always takes precedence," Lindemans said.

The original goals identified included construction of six new 1,300 square foot houses, upgrading and modernizing the existing baseball field, and creating a park/playground area for tribal children.

Lindemans said, due to the Ashland unit of reservists being activated, the project had to be scaled back.

"Actual attainment of the identified goals is dependent upon availability of military units that provide the services," Lindemans said.

"The threat of conflict overseas might adversely alter the timeline availability committed to the Red Cliff project in 2004."

Red Cliff's participation with Walking


Shield is expected to include fiscal year 2004 and 2005.

The 2004 project cost is estimated at \$5.7 million. Approximately \$3 million of the cost will be Federal Department of Defense Innovative Readiness Training funds appropriated specifically to support the military units providing the labor and the equipment.

The funds will be used to house and feed about 1,100 participating military personnel throughout the summer of 2004, utilizing hotels and restaurants in the local area.

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