

Sault Tribe inspires ‘Gift-givers’

By Brandon Seng, Communications Manager, Michigan Nonprofit Association



In Ojibwe society, each person had clearly defined roles and responsibilities that they fulfilled for the benefit of their families and communities. A strong sense of family and community remains as one of the most important values our ancestors gave to us. By volunteering to help the community we can continue to honor the teachings of our ancestors...

This was an excerpt taken from the Volunteer Resource Directory of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and only begins to show the Tribe’s deep commitment to service and volunteerism. To support tribe members in celebrating this piece of their rich heritage, the United Way Volunteer Center of Chippewa County has opened a satellite volunteer center within the Sault Tribe. The center carries an appropriate name, Maagwejjig, Ojibwe for Gift-giver.

Maagwejjig operates in the same capacity as other Volunteer Centers within Michigan’s Volunteer Center network, which manage, track and match community volunteers with volunteer opportunities. The center is the first of its kind among the many Tribal Nations in our state and across the country, and hopes to inspire others to start similar initiatives.

“The idea of a tribal volunteer center is unique to Michigan, explained Diana Algra, Executive Director of the Volunteer Centers of Michigan. “Tribal nations could easily replicate what was started within our network, and the benefit to their communities would be substantial.”

The tribal community is in itself, a volunteer network, and the Maagwejjig center has began to build infrastructure to support this network. Being able to collect data on the service taking place within the Sault Tribe, community leaders will have a better idea of what services are offered, and which ones are needed.

“Our culture is deeply rooted in community,” said Kristi Little, Associate Executive Director of the Sault Tribe. “There is a strong sense of family and each clan has a role and a responsibility within the community. Historically we’ve been doing everything that a Volunteer Center does, but the structure it provides will help us do it more effectively.”

Organizing those that volunteer within the Tribe is proving to be no small feat, and with the support of AmeriCorps*VISTA Sonnet Quinn, the center is beginning to capture and record some of this data. “If we could currently track the total numbers of volunteer

hours given by the tribe, it would be unbelievable,” said Quinn. “Through Maagwejig, we are getting the first factual glimpse of how engaged this community is.”

In addition to the aforementioned benefits of Maagwejig, the Sault Tribe is witnessing other positive affects that come from volunteerism. Members of the tribe have come to better understand their culture, and those curious about their heritage have been given yet another glimpse of what it means to be a member of the Sault Tribe.

For more information about Maagwejig contact:

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