



## Exceptional, Outstanding Leaders

Graduates of First St. Croix Chippewa NACCD Program Celebrate Their Achievements

by Carrol Walther

A question rang through the air, "What are you going to be?" "Exceptional, outstanding leaders," came the hesitant response of the 32 class members enrolled in the St. Croix Chippewa tribe's first-ever Native American Casino Career Development program (NACCD). "I can't hear you!" came another shout. "Exceptional, outstanding leaders!" the class answered, punctuating each word with a fist pump. With every week of the fourteen-week training program, the class's enthusiasm and confidence grew. On Wednesday December 14, 21 NACCD program graduates made their

voices heard loudly and clearly at a special graduation ceremony held at the St. Croix Casino in Turtle Lake, WI.

Ever since its first casinos opened in 1991 and 1992, the St. Croix tribe has been a pacesetter for Indian Country training programs. The NACCD program continues the tribe's tradition of excellence at the same time as it sets a new standard. Designed to train Native Americans for leadership positions at the tribe's gaming facilities, the NACCD program is the most comprehensive training program the tribe has established to date.

NACCD classes were held at the St. Croix Casino's training & development annex for four hours every Monday from September 12 through December 12. Class sessions – 28 in all – covered a full range of theoretical and practical aspects of casino management, including business planning, time and stress management, supervising and training people, goal setting and career planning, decision making and problem solving, budgeting, leadership, customer service and public relations, employment law-and more.

Participation was limited to tribal members currently employed at one of the St. Croix Tribe's gaming facilities. Facilitated by St. Croix Chippewa training & development manager, Carrol Walther, the first edition of the new 14-week program was an unqualified success. Twenty-one students completed all course requirements and received



"We're exceptional, outstanding leaders," proclaim Butch Buck, Rodney Jacobson, Andrea Candler, Velma Broome and Wayne Rogers.

diplomas, including Lisa Marie Belisle, Shannon Belanger, Velma Broome, Butch Buck, Andrea Candler, Shelly Ford, Victoria Gouge, Denise Hart, Rodney Jacobson, Barbara LaBlanc, Jamie Long, Brenda Marek, Darlene Matrious, Anthony Pewaush, Jaclyn Pewaush, Loretta Potter, Wayne Rogers, Thomas Saros, Beverly Schuna, David Shabaiah and Timothy Tyler.

The intensive curriculum and the outstanding program graduation rate notwithstanding, it would still be tempting to classify the

NACCD program as just another in the plethora of training programs available for Native Americans. What made the NACCD program different? First was the St. Croix Tribe's commitment to the program from start to finish. "It would have been easy to send our tribal employees to management seminars or community colleges for training," Carroll Walther remarked, "but designing our own program and holding the class sessions on-site at the St. Croix Casino underscored the fact that the tribe is invested in the outcome of the training. It also made it more convenient for the students to attend classes. That meant a lot to the students enrolled in the program."

Second were commitments from the students themselves. "In order to graduate, each participant was required to attend at least 85% of the classes offered," Carroll said. "I'm so proud that two-thirds of the students who started the program finished the program. That's a real testament to their level of commitment."

Third was class participation. Presenters for the program were recruited from the three tribal casino enterprises and the St. Croix Tribal Center. "It made sense to tap presenters and trainers with expertise in the gaming industry," Carroll remarked. "More important, however, was choosing trainers who would involve the class in their presentations." Carroll explained that the lifeblood of individual training sessions was role playing and class



Velma, Andrea, Butch, Rod and Wayne prepare a presentation for the rest of the NACCD class.

participation. “Class exercises made the learning hands-on and helped class members to get to know one another better and to network with one another,” she added

Fourth, the NACCD program prepared students for life after class. “Too many training programs give students a lot of information but don't help them to apply that information in a practical way,” Carroll said. “We felt that the best way to learn about management and leadership was to work in the casino environment.” She explained that along with attending classes, NACCD participants were required to job-shadow in a casino department of their choice, beginning at entry level and working up to higher levels within the department. Carroll added that another of the program requirements was the completion of a portfolio, including a cover letter, a resume, references, letters of recommendation and goals for one, five and ten years. “With their portfolios in hand, graduates are all ready to apply for work in one of our casino enterprises or wherever else they choose,” she said. “And setting short- and long-term goals is a very practical way for the graduates to monitor their own progress.”

Finally is aftercare. To help them succeed in progressing toward the goals they have set, graduates have the option of entering a mentoring program for one year, an option most of the graduates are pursuing. Mentoring programs began in January and February.

At the NACCD program graduation on December 14, three of the graduates reflected on the program's significance for them. After thanking her fellow students, the St. Croix Tribe and the program's trainers, Beverly Schuna remarked, “We made great connections and got to know one another.” Anthony Pewaush noted that, thanks to the NACCD program, he had a much more comprehensive idea of what St. Croix Tribal enterprises are all about. Loretta Potter, a 2005 graduate of LCO College, stressed the effect that her training has already had

and will continue to have on her family. “I'm a positive role model for my children,” she said.

Hazel Hindsley, a member of the St. Croix Tribal Council, commended the 21 NACCD graduates for their achievement. “I hope this class will help you meet your goals,” she said. “I wish the best for each one of you in your careers.” To conclude the graduation ceremony, Carroll Walther once again shouted, “What are you?” At last, each member of the class could respond with complete confidence, “An exceptional, outstanding leader!”

What's next for the program and for the first graduates? The NACCD program caught the attention of the dean of students at LCO Ojibwa Community College. Plans are in the works for the college to accredit the program for its students, which means that the program will become a permanent component of St. Croix Tribal training programs.

As for the graduates, Carroll Walther summed it up best: “These individuals are our future,” she said. And with these graduates in leadership positions, that future promises to be nothing but exceptional and outstanding. ♣

*For more information about the NACCD program, contact Carroll Walther at (800) 846-8946, ext. 3153.*

**BEAUTIFUL BEYOND: CHRISTIAN SONGS IN NATIVE LANGUAGES**  
 is an amazing musical experience — the spiritual voices of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians raised in song offers a history lesson about resilience and cultural endurance.

“Looking past the tragedies of Native Americans throughout history, this anthology gives a meaningful respite...using the transcendent power of spiritual music.” —News from Indian Country.

A new recording from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian and Smithsonian Folkways. Release coincided with the Grand Opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 21. Just in time for the Holidays, this CD makes the perfect gift for the music lovers in your family.

To order: (888) FOLKWAYS or [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu).

For more information about the National Museum of the American Indian, visit [www.AmericanIndian.si.edu](http://www.AmericanIndian.si.edu)