

Cherokees fight meth with policing, treatment

CHEROKEE, N.C. (AP) — Cherokee tribal leaders say stepped up enforcement and expanded treatment for drug addicts are part of a series of signs the tribe is fighting the growing use of methamphetamine on the reservation.

As hundreds of meth labs have been discovered across western North Carolina this year, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians made changes in treatment, law enforcement and public awareness that observers credit as a model for other communities.

The Eastern Band's anti-drug efforts are among the most effective in the region because it has encouraged the public to help police, Western Carolina University professor Gordon Mercer said.

"They have had one of the very best education programs," said Mercer, director of the university's Public Policy Institute, which is preparing a report on western North Carolina's

meth problem.

Principal Chief Michell Hicks credits progress in the tribe's fight against meth on the Cherokee's community spirit.

"Our community is pretty tight-knit," he said, "and I think that has really helped us with our approach."

The tribe has adopted a law regulating the sale of cold-medicine tablets containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine that is stricter than the one North Carolina passed this year.

The Cherokee law passed in July requires buyers to get the drugs, which are ingredients in making meth, from a pharmacist. Unless the Tribal Council votes to keep that version of the law, however, the less restrictive state version will replace it on Jan. 15.

A police hotline has generated tips that led to more than 50 drug arrests, Cherokee Indian Police Chief Eric Pritchett said.

The tribe has hired a private company to test confiscated

drugs rather than rely on the State Bureau of Investigation. The agency's backlog of cases can delay court proceedings for months, a problem confronting other North Carolina police departments.

The Cherokee police force has expanded from one narcotics specialist to three and started a canine unit with three drug dogs. The police also created a task force to work with Swain and Jackson counties and the FBI to arrest suspects who flee the reservation.

Pritchett pointed to declines in police calls for service this year as evidence that the tribe's anti-drug efforts are working. Calls dropped from 4,647 in the first seven months of 2004 to 3,923 calls in the same period of this year. Burglaries a crime that increased on the reservation because of drugs, were cut from 82 last year to 66 this year.

Low levels of income and education help explain the appeal of drugs for some mem-

bers of the tribe, said Mickey Strother, manager of the behavioral health program A Na Le Ni Sgi (ah NAH la NEE shgee). In the Cherokee language, the name means, "they are beginning."

Nearly one in five families on the reservation lived below the poverty line in 1999, more than twice the 9 percent of North Carolina families living in poverty. More than 8,000 people lived on the reservation in 1999.

"When you have generational hopelessness, when you have people who have been put down and left on the fringes of society," Strother said, "drug dealers prey on these people because they want to alter their perceptions and the way they feel."

A Na Le Ni Sgi, started in September 2004 to serve drug addicts and mental health patients, averaged 478 meetings with patients per month from January to August, up from 91 in the program's first four months.

Rehberg turns back money from Abramoff, clients

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — U.S. Rep. Denny Rehberg has relinquished \$19,900 in campaign donations received from indicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff and his clients, a spokesman for the Montana Republican said.

The \$2,000 from Abramoff himself has been given to domestic violence centers on Montana's Fort Belknap and Fort Peck Indian reservations, spokesman Erik Iverson said. Other donations were returned to the American Indian tribes that were Abramoff's clients, Iverson said. None of the tribes are in Montana.

"It's all done," Iverson told the Lee Newspapers of Montana. "The checks are out the door."

Rehberg's announcement came a day after Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., said he was returning \$150,000 in Abramoff-related donations. The senator's possible actions on behalf of Abramoff clients are under examination.

Abramoff is at the center of an ongoing U.S. Justice Department investigation into lobbying practices. The investigation focuses on allegations that Abramoff cheated tribes out of millions of dollars for lobbying and directed them to make contributions to lawmakers and political groups.

Records show Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., received \$6,000 from Abramoff's tribal clients in 2001 and 2002. Baucus will be "more than happy" to return money if an analysis by his staff finds anything questionable, spokesman Barrett Kaiser said, adding the senator has not met Abramoff nor worked with him.

Refinery would be a first

MAKOTI, N.D. (AP) — A draft environmental impact statement for a proposed tribal refinery here is expected to be ready for public comment at the end of March.

Three Affiliated Tribes officials announced in 2003 that the refinery was proposed for about 10 acres of land west of Makoti. More land was purchased later and now the tribes have a total of 469 acres in that area. The Makoti refinery would be the first refinery built in the U.S. in about 30 years, and the first one owned by an Indian tribe and located on a reservation.

Tribes show interest in targeted naval air station

BRUNSWICK, Maine (AP) — Maine's Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indian tribes have expressed interest in the Brunswick Naval Air Station, which is to be redeveloped after its closure.

The tribes are ruling out such controversial ideas as a casino or a liquefied natural gas terminal at the site, which is being decommissioned as part of the base realignment and closure process. The Navy is scheduled to leave the more than 3,000-acre site in 2011.

"We're not interested in being mavericks," said Tim Love, an economic development adviser to the Penobscots.

Craig Francis, general counsel for the Passamaquoddies, said, "The tribe's thinking is that it's an opportunity that could be a win-win for everybody."

The two tribes expressed their interest in letters to the U.S. Interior Department.

The Penobscots appear to have a clearer idea of what they'd do with the property, such as manufacturing a wood-based product, doing aviation maintenance and manufacturing airplane parts, or production of renewable energy. Love said the tribe intends to form a partnership with an existing business.

The Passamaquoddies aren't yet publicizing any specific business plans.

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Group wants judge to rethink order to return Hawaiian artifacts

HONOLULU (AP) — A group is asking a federal judge to reconsider ordering them to retrieve Native Hawaiian artifacts from a Big Island Cave, saying it has new evidence that gives a "full picture" of the case.

Hui Malama I Na Kupuna O Hawaii Nei has refused to comply with a Sept. 7 order by U.S. District Judge David Ezra that instructs the group to give the 83 items back to Bishop Museum. The order was reaffirmed this week by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Hui Malama, which repatriates artifacts and human remains found around the world, claims to have buried the items — including a human-hair wig, containers with human teeth and carved wooden statuettes of family gods — in a cave after borrowing them from the museum in 2000.

Alan Murakami, an attorney with the Native Legal Hawaiian Corp. who is representing Hui Malama, said during a news conference on Friday that the court needs to consider new evidence on the case.

Among the new material, the group said, is a statement from a masonry contractor who used concrete to seal the cave housing the artifacts.

According to the contractor, the cave could collapse if members of Hui Malama or others tried to enter it, though that argument has been rejected by the

appellate court and also by Ezra.

Hui Malama also said a letter from the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation review committee stated the items should remain buried.

"There are good grounds for Judge Ezra to look at this information and really consider whether or not he truly had the complete picture," said Murakami.

The items, known as the Forbes Collection, were taken from the Kawaihae Caves on the Big Island in 1905. Hui Malama contends that the items were looted from the cave and illegally given to the museum.

During the news conference, Hui Malama complained that the items' fate is being decided "in a Western court" that has no understanding of Hawaiian traditions.

Hui Malama is one of 13 Hawaiian groups with claims to the objects. Sherry Broder, an attorney for the groups Na Lei Alii Kawanakoa and the Royal Hawaiian Academy of Traditional Arts, which sued Hui Malama for the objects' return, said the courts are clear on what they want.

"They need to comply," Broder said. "There are federal court orders against them. It is not what they wanted and I can understand that. They have lost."

Ezra has scheduled a status hearing on the case for Dec. 20.

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