



Up Close with Barbara Griffin, Director of Human Resources for Port Madison Enterprises

Barbara Griffin is Director of Human Resources for Port Madison Enterprises, the economic engine of the Suquamish Tribe. Griffin oversees staffing for PME, which includes Suquamish Clearwater Casino Resort, as well as training and educational programs for employees and tribal members. Indian Gaming magazine recently spoke to Griffin about her role at PME. Here is what she had to say...

Tell us about Port Madison Enterprises (PME) and the businesses it oversees.

Port Madison Enterprises is the business agency wing of the Suquamish Tribe. We currently offer Suquamish Clearwater Casino Resort, as well as Kiana Lodge, which is a beautiful wedding and corporate event location right on the water. We have a retail division consisting of three gas station convenience stores as well as a Subway. We have a property management division in which we have seen a huge interest, such that we're constructing another building for that campus.

One of the emphases for the tribe is diversification. When tribal gaming started, the majority of tribes were focused on casinos and the revenue they generated to support tribal government and tribal programs. Since then, we've started to see tribes moving in a direction that doesn't limit their eggs to one basket. This presents more opportunities for tribal members, as well.

PME is an entity that allows other tribal programs to be realized. For example, the tribe is building a gathering house and the capital plan includes a new museum and art center. Those projects are very important to the tribe's culture and while employees of PME might not be directly involved in making those decisions, anything they do, whether it's customer service or one of our other programs, demonstrates to the public that the tribe doesn't just represent a casino. Although we're very grateful for the revenue dollars that the casino generates, there is more that should be sustainable.

We have a very unique opportunity in that many tribes have one HR department that oversees the enterprise as well as the tribal government. The Suquamish Tribe has been very progressive in that PME acts as the business agency for the tribe, but the tribal government also includes the accounting department, HR and support staff. We also have a board of directors, which is appointed by tribal council, that makes the business decisions.

As Director of Human Resources, what is the most challenging part of your job?

The most challenging aspect as the HR Director is ensuring that the lines of communication flow across PME. Russell

Steele, our CEO, is a real champion of continued communication, which is very helpful. PME's various entities are not little islands and what happens to one entity impacts all of them. For example, when we built the hotel we conducted a full media campaign with our casino employees. We educated our employees on the hotel project so they could share that information with our guests. We knew that this would create a reward in terms of hotel occupancy and things of that nature.

How do you attract qualified individuals?

We have a bit of a struggle in terms of geography. To get to our location requires a ferry ride and crossing bridges. With today's gas prices, that becomes an issue. But we do offer wonderful benefits. We pay 100% of employee medical, dental and vision after 90 days, but the coup de grace is our 401K. We match 150% up to the first 4%. This is available to employees after one year of service. Employees arrive in droves every time we enroll, which is quarterly. It's a great benefit and has allowed our employees to regard PME as more of a career rather than just a job.

How has the economy affected the job market in your region?

We haven't seen a huge impact on our recruitment efforts. We are all very aware of gas prices and how much more it costs an employee to get to work. Those are factors that we've started to discuss and have brainstormed solutions we can implement as a business. We are also aware that if we don't start addressing this issue, particularly gas prices, our employees might start to make other decisions with regard to their employment. Currently we have a few ideas that are awaiting board approval.

What incentives or special programs do you offer employees?

We offer what we call our Healthy Steps Program. This program provides incentives for employees to make positive health goals. Incentives include gym reimbursement, cash rewards for weight loss, and cash rewards for quitting smoking. We have wellness fairs twice a year where employees are

provided with complimentary health screenings.

As we grow, we also want to make a positive impact in the community. We hold blood drives just about every other month. Whether it's a guest, an employee, or a community member, if they attempt to make a donation they'll receive a voucher for a free meal in our buffet. We have also partnered for three years with our local elementary school and send employees who serve as mentors to elementary school children.

We are very active with our local Relays for Life. This year we've broken into two teams for raising money and we will all walk in that event. We also have a fun program called Poker Faces. All of our managers and different employees volunteer to put their faces in a huge poker chip and have wet sponges thrown at them. We raised about \$2,500. We have a lot of different opportunities for our employees to give back and be involved. When employees start giving up their personal time in support of the company's programs, we see ownership and stewardship, which reflect our core values.

Explain the Tribal Management Intern program and the Casino Management Certificate course you have planned.

The management intern program addresses succession planning, equipping tribal members for management positions. Two individuals enrolled in the program will graduate next year, one from UNLV with a hospitality and casino management degree, the other from Washington State University with a hospitality degree. Our next challenge will be assimilating them into the business. We certainly don't want to put them in a position for which they aren't ready, but we want to make sure that we get them in that track as quickly as possible.

We also have a program called Fundamentals of Supervision, which we provide in-house. The course is attended by individuals who would like to be supervisors as well as new managers who need a refresher. We recently finished one of the programs and are working with a local community college, Olympic College, to have that program evaluated for college credit. We are working with Olympic College to institute a casino management vocational technical certificate that is much more in-depth. It would take one year to finish all of the coursework and covers everything that a casino department head or



manager encounters. This program isn't just for Clearwater, but for other tribal casinos in our area, as well. People within our community would benefit from this program and it would be another avenue for recruitment.

What health and community involvement programs do you currently have in place?

Our Holiday Outreach program has, for the past six years, provided Christmas for a number of North Kitsap families. We approach local not-for-profit organizations and obtain names, gift wishes, and sizes for children 18 and under and then put together a holiday party. This year North Kitsap Fire and Rescue came and brought Santa on the fire engine. One of our local photographers takes family holiday photos, which is really a luxury for the families. We have a full holiday dinner that our food vendors donate and the families also receive grocery store gift certificates to supplement their season. It's a wonderful program and grew from approximately 30 children initially to well over 110 this past year.

Our Harvest to Hope program takes place around the Thanksgiving holiday. At our different locations we put out food collection bins and then donate 50% of the donations to our local food bank and 50% to the Suquamish Tribe's food bank. Last year we raised almost twice as much food, in pounds, as we did the first year. In addition, the PME board of directors has a donation fund. Not-for-profit groups can make presentations to receive funds for different programs. That's over and above what the tribe contributes through the compact dollars that are allocated to the state.

What's on the horizon for PME?

We're currently not adding to PME's portfolio. Since there is no current large business venture we're pursuing, this is a time when we are providing a great deal of training for our supervisors and managers. We want to make sure that the infrastructure is very strong and in terms of our interpersonal skills before we launch our next big project. I have no idea what that project might be, but having been with PME for over five years, I know there's something coming soon. ♣

For more information on Port Madison Enterprises and Clearwater Casino Resort, visit www.clearwatercasino.com.