

Young leaders strive for better reservati

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Provost said a single idea for even the smallest improvement on the reservations may require the approval of about eight different agencies including the tribal council, the BIA, the state government, the Indian Health Service, the town board and the tribal court.

Since President Ronald Reagan has been in office, Kitto and Blackhawk agree, the federal money for development and social programs has been tight. Workers at the BIA were not able to determine how much money has been cut.

Because of the lack of financing, programs for economic growth have been limited.

Unemployment on the three reservations averages about 64 percent, according to statistics from the Nebraska Indian Commission. The per capita income averages \$2,779.

According to the same report, some of the obstacles facing employment are: alcoholism, lack of education, communication barriers and lack of understanding of Indian culture and prejudice.

Despite the barriers, however, people like Kitto, Blackhawk and Reuben Snake, head of the Winnebago tribal council for 11 years, said they are optimistic about the jobs that have been provided and about recent achievements.

Snake, who remains on the tribal council and is economic development director for the Seventh Generation Fund, said since the Indian people have been in control of their own programs and money — instead of the federal government — things have been better.

"When we gain control we do what we need to do, when the government gains control they do what they want us to do," Snake said.

"Indians are always interpreted as inhibiting

growth in communities," Snake said, "but they don't talk about who was in control."

Snake said many times people not living on reservations and the media focus on the problems on reservations, but very few talk about the achievements.

For example, Snake said, "We are educating out people to a much greater degree than when

Blackhawk said of the about 1,300 people on the Winnebago reservation, most of the people employed earn money from the tribal offices; Winn-A-Bingo, a gaming facility in Iowa; the Company A Service Station Center on the reservation's main street; and a local grocery store. Winn-A-Bingo does over \$2 million each year in business, he said.

people as a whole. To keep their homes, Indian people need to learn to access "the system" and make it work for them, according to Frank LaMere, a Winnebago Indian Commission member and executive director of the Nebraska Indian Intertribal Development Corporation.

LaMere, who is very active in tribal, state and national politics, said government and elected officials have a large impact on Indian's lives. American Indians have to remember that, he said.

"When all else fails, we have to go back and read the directions," LaMere said, referring to the constitution.

"By accessing the system, we will be able to be heard and receive our due from the United States government," he said.

Indian people also have to be visible in politics, he said, to prove their commitment.

"We've got to put in the time and effort to be recognized by party leaders as good."

LaMere said American Indians have "earned their voice" in decision making because "they have been the first to answer the nation's call in times of conflict in a greater proportion to the rest of society."

During the Vietnam era, 81,000 American Indians served in the U.S. armed forces and 41,000 fought in Vietnam, he said.

LaMere said he had five brothers who served during the Vietnam era and one of them died "defending the constitution."

"Now we look to the American public to guarantee our rights under the constitution," he said.

If American Indians are active, LaMere said, and hold on to their land, the people will survive. Without the home base most Indians agree that Indian tradition, culture, language and families will disappear.

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-- Snake

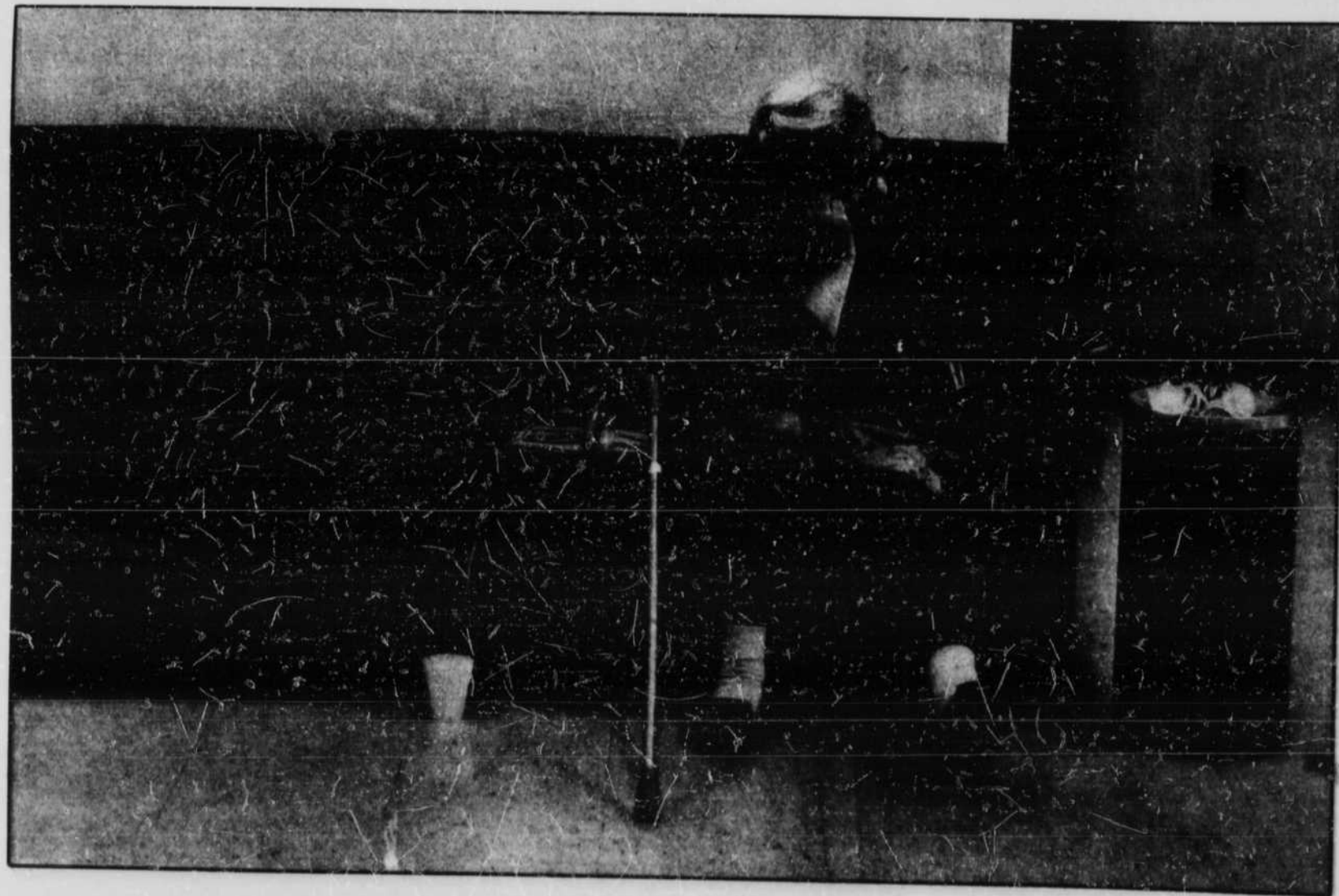
the government was in control."

In 1980, Snake said the Winnebagos designed a plan to become self-sufficient in 20 years. "In 1980 we had nothing," Snake said. After nine years of working toward their goal, the Winnebago "rolled over" about \$50 million in sales last year.

People on the Santee reservation are developing similar plans for development in order to utilize their land, abundant water supply and timber.

Kitto said that of the 650 people living on the Santee reservation, about 85 people are employed by the tribe and the school. Becton Dickinson Pharmaceutical, a plant with non-Indian ownership, prepares needles and syringes for medical use and employs 25 Santee residents. About 15 additional people are employed through housing projects, local businesses, a small beef cattle ranch and a hay

cubing plant that processes alfalfa.



Above: Phoebe Tebo, 60, passes time at the Blackhawk Community Center on the Winnebago reservation. Tebo, whose husband Samuel was once head of the Winnebago tribal council, said new young leaders in the community are turning things around for American Indians. Right: American Indians have been accused of not contributing to non-Indian society. According to Frank LaMere, a member of the Nebraska Indian Commission, high percentages of Indians have died defending the U.S. Constitution. Far right: Children play at the Omaha reservation in Macy.

on life

Blackhawk said much of the future of the people on reservations lie with new leaders and Indian children.

Snake agreed that creative new leaders have worked hard and are very active — but whether the children will want to work as hard to prosper remains to be seen.

Snake said today's Indian children get caught up in pressures to assimilate into the mainstream American way of life and materialism.

"It's hard to teach your children traditional values when you are competing with TV," Snake said.

But LaMere said people can "take heart" in the fact that "maintaining tribal identity and culture remains one of the highest priorities of all the tribal leaders in the country."

LaMere said its important to remember many of the concerns and values Indian people have are the same as those of non-Indians.

"We are no different than they are," he said.

"There has just been a danger in this country of others determining the wants, needs and agenda of the Indian people," Indian people just want the power to decide those things for themselves, he said.

LaMere said in light of the upcoming election, many people have been talking about the importance of family.

"Something inherent when you talk about hard work and self sufficiency is opportunity... on the reservations there has been no opportunity."

Indian people, he said, would like the opportunity to better their way of life.

Given that opportunity, he said, "I think people would realize that we're not so different after all."

