



St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

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NEWS RELEASE

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Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Health Service Director Retires

Debbie Martin Retires After 33 Years Serving Akwesasne

Akwesasne N.Y. - In 1973, a young nurse built the foundation for her career through experience, but in her retirement, reflects the most important lessons learned came from our Elders in her early years. Debbie Martin has dedicated thirty-three years to caring for the people's health of Akwesasne. Her first years of nursing were spent in the community, checking on our elders. The first thing she learned was the bonds she formed were rooted in relationships, family history and the art of listening. Debbie reflects on those visits with a firm commitment to the values she was taught; patience, respect and compassion. She spent hours talking to elders, and subsequently learned to use her intuition to enhance the skills she was taught in nursing school. "My patient's vital signs may have been ok, but I knew our elders wanted to be 'good patients', so I had to learn to find ways to make sure they were safe without pushing the envelope."

The importance of family in our culture is the most critical aspect of our approach to healthcare. Debbie's wisdom as an elder is woven in the first question she was always asked when she entered a patient's home, which is now the first question she asks of patients; "How is your family?." In modern healthcare, we spend more money, we have more doctors and nurses and the complexity of medicine and extensive diagnostic tools we have cannot compensate for communication between the nurse and the patient. Communication was of utmost importance then, and it remains the core of effective care-giving. Debbie makes a strong life-long observation that language = trust. She remembers a native speaking nurse who translated for a physician and recalls the power of the trust she witnessed in those visits.

Her love for her team is apparent in her actions as she shares her mantra, "community means everything." Crisis in our community has deep roots; Debbie and her team have a culture of being there for our people, regardless of the time or day. One memorable employee came in on a Saturday to care for a patient. She held the woman's hand and assured her she would be there for as long as she needed her. This approach to crisis and hardship is not found just anywhere, but it's in Akwesasne and it is in the hearts of the Health Services team.

Debbie is excited to transition to retirement, but will forever hold her team of 115 working in thirteen divisions, in the highest of regards. "It is a privilege to be in my position, as I've had the latitude to bring visions and innovations to our community, such as Centering for Pregnancy, Trauma Informed Care and Trauma Incident Reduction. On the cusp of her retirement, Debbie had the honor of

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welcoming our community and guests to the Grand Opening of the Diabetes Center For Excellence, her “greatest joy” born of a vision, a community commitment and a need for our fight against the debilitating chronic disease that plagues so many Mohawks, young and old.

Debbie transitioned her reins on February 7, 2014. Of the next leader of her team, she asks for an understanding of our people, the importance of our language and a sense of humor. Healthcare is a tough business; Debbie smiles and reflects on her professional journey and credits the early years of caring for elders for her success: “Through it all, they taught me to laugh; it was a special time to be a nurse.”

Quotes:

The Tribe is thankful to Debbie for her many years of dedicated service. We wish her well in her retirement. – Tsiorasa Barreiro, Executive Director

Debbie is a very caring individual. She always emphasizes that patients are the priority, that is why we are here. Debbie has innovative ideas and goes after what she thinks will benefit the entire community, i.e. Diabetes Center of Excellence, Centering for Pregnancy, Chronic Care Program Transportation Program, School Based Health, After-Hours Care, and Trauma Informed Care training. Debbie is always thinking outside the box and once an idea is formed, she comes to us to see how we can accomplish this mission. As a team, we work together to accomplish this and when we run into barriers, Debbie is always there to remove the barriers. Our team respects Debbie as our leader. She always looks out for all staff and always has the best interest of the staff in mind. - Health Services Administrative Team

It has been my greatest pleasure to work alongside our Health Director Debra Martin. She made it possible, for those of us who desired it, to enhance the type of care we provided at our Health Facility to include various healing practices and innovative services in addition to the already existing conventional medical care in the clinic and the Traditional Medicine Program in the Mental Health Dept. Her vision is always guided by genuine love for the community and her desire for us all to not only be physically well but to always have the opportunity for true healing. We will miss her greatly at Health Services though I know she won't be far away, extending a caring hand to those who need it. – Chief Beverly Cook

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government of the Saint Regis Mohawk People.