



Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

Chief Barbara A. Lazore
Chief James W. Ransom
Chief Monica M. Jacobs
Sub-Chief Stacy A. Adams
Sub-Chief Ronald LaFrance Jr.

PRESS RELEASE

For release:
Seskeha/August 5, 2008

For more information:
Public Information Office
St. Regis Mohawk Tribe
Tel: (518) 358-2272 ext. 286 or
Fax: (518) 358-9675

TRIBE ON PATH TO CREATING A TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICE

Feasibility Study Paves the Way for Tribal Communications System

Akwesasne Territory. The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe recently commissioned a comprehensive feasibility study for developing its own telecommunications company. The study was conducted over a ten-month period by the Four Horizons Development Company, a Native-owned firm who found that a Tribal telecommunications company is both feasible and essential. The system would be carried on a state-of-the-art fiber optics network.

The Tribe has long pursued plans to diversify its economy and attain self-sufficiency by asserting control over community infrastructure. The study shows that a state-of-the-art telecommunications system is an essential element for a strong tribal economy. "Building a Tribal broadband capacity and telecommunications network allows the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe to shape its own future by meeting community priorities," said Tribal Chief James W. Ransom.

"A Tribal telecommunications company will create jobs and stimulate economic development," said Tribal Chief Barbara A. Lazore. A Tribal telecommunications system will provide access the Internet and e-mails, enhance community teaching and learning, build new language and cultural preservation tools, develop new skill sets for workers, improve community ties, build new bridges to the global market, meet public safety needs and support remote medical services. It will also provide tools to manage governmental services, including government accounting and reporting. The project is expected to create about thirty to forty new jobs.

"We'd like every home and business in the community to have access to a fiber optic system," said Tribal Chief Monica M. Jacobs. "Right now we have no high-speed internet service. A Tribal telecommunications company would fill that need."

412 State Route 37
Akwesasne, New York 13655
Phone: 518-358-2272
Fax: 518-358-3205

Helping Build A Better Tomorrow

The Tribe currently pays about \$300,000 per year to outside communications providers. A tribal telecommunications system will keep these fees in the tribal economy and strengthen the Tribe's autonomy and sovereignty. Chief Lazore said "Keeping those dollars here in the community is important."

Only eight Tribes have established telecom companies on their reservations. After forming their own telecom company, over 98 percent of the Mescalero Apache community have phone service and broadband access today. In 1990, less than 10 percent of the community even had phone service. "The Mescalero Apache and the seven other tribes that have established telecommunications companies show this is achievable with the right plan" said Chief Ransom. "We are working toward the same goal of establishing the telecommunications company as a limited liability corporation that is self-sustaining."

The corporation will need to borrow nearly \$25 million for the project, but the risk and liability will be entirely the corporation's responsibility, not the Tribe's. The Tribe will guarantee the start-up costs of the telecommunications company, but costs can be recouped through public financing from the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) loan program. RUS loans have low interest rates and a long pay-back schedule – up to twenty-five years. Seven of the eight tribal telecommunications systems were funded by the RUS. "Another prime benefit of becoming a regulated telecommunications company is that an eligible telecommunications carrier, or E.T.C., can gain access to a \$7 billion Universal Service Fund that will subsidize the telecommunications company's revenues" added Chief Ransom.

"It will take almost two years to build this system and we have many regulatory and other challenges," said Chief Lazore. "However, the benefits to the community far outweigh the difficulties of building the system."

"Building a telecommunications company will be a challenging task. We will make sure the community is aware of each step of the process as we proceed," concluded Chief Jacobs. "A special community meeting will be scheduled in the coming weeks to present the feasibility study."

#

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