



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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This building we are dedicating today is testimony to the enterprising spirit of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indian Tribe, the business wisdom of the men who recognized a market for low-cost authentic reproductions of Chippewayan handicraft, and the concern of congress, the Department of the Interior, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs for economic improvement among the Indian people.

This industry promises to be the beginning of a new cycle of success for the Indian people of this reservation. It will provide jobs--and income--for several Chippewa families, Last week, I am told, the first training group, consisting of 23 Indians, completed their apprenticeship and began work in the plant as full-time production workers. Two office workers and the assistant manager are also Indian. Only the manager is non-Indian. Thus, of the 27 presently employed, 26 are Indians.

This may seem a small number compared with the population here at Turtle Mountain, who would like steady, year-round jobs, But if this industry prospers and grows--and we are confident it will - it will provide regular, well-paying employment for a hundred or more now unemployed persons, It will raise the living standards of their families and will provide, through its total weekly payroll, a vigorous stimulant to the economy of the whole community, You may not realize just how much planning and cooperative effort are involved in the creation of this industry, It all materialized through the energetic efforts of the Bureau's staff for industrial development, working with your tribal leaders. Let me explain briefly how our program operates: Professional staff members of the Bureau of Indian Affairs serve as representatives of Indian tribes and nearby communities to secure the location of industry on the reservations or near them. The Bureau offers industry specialized help in analyzing the opportunities available, in terms of manpower and natural resources that would seem to enhance the success of a business venture. Funds to construct plants generally come, in part, from loans from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, in part from tribal loans, and in part from commercial sources, on-the job training of Indian workmen is financed by the Bureau, thus guaranteeing a company trained manpower and guaranteeing the Indian people some direct benefits from the business.

This plant at Belcourt is just one among 40 new industries that have been developed on or near Indian reservations in the past few years. Economic development has been a primary emphasis of the Bureau for the last four years, reflecting the concern of the Administration for the economic well-being of all Americans.

Does this industrial development effort payoff? I think the record speaks for itself. There are 1,000 Indians at work today who were jobless before new industries were brought into their areas through the Bureau's efforts. Meanwhile, business attracts more business, as the situation on the Eastern Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina proves. There are four plants there now, one of which is soon to be dedicated--and there is actually a shortage of Indian labor as a result. But the whole economy of the areas has improved, with 'benefits accruing to non-Indians as well as to the Indians.

This is the kind of economic development that is helping break up pockets of poverty in the United States. It is the kind of economic development that we hope to see generated among the Indians of the Dakotas.

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