



**Current Edition: Friday, December 14, 2007**

## **Cheryl Maltais Takes the Helm Of Tribal Nation**

By JACK SHEA

Cheryl Andrews-Maltais believes she has been elected to run a troubled nation.

As chairman of the tribal council for the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), that effectively means she is the chief operating officer of a sovereign state, and the public leader of a culture and of a citizenry of 340 on the Island and hundreds more living off Island.

She is required to provide leadership to tribal business interests, to manage tribal general health and welfare, to interact with local municipalities and with state and federal governments and their agencies and to seek guidance from the tribal council — in this case, a board of directors who show up every day rather than once a month for lunch.

And if the financial coffers are thin, she can't levy taxes, a tried and true gambit for most governments but not for Native American nations.

Still, she is looking forward to the job she sought because she believed her nation was troubled and she could help it to heal.

"We have to get our members involved and change the apathy, the thinking that it's a mess up there and I don't want to get involved," she said. "Over the past nine years we moved from the great white father culture to a self-determinant government. We have a foundation. We have to build a strong structure on it."

Her life lessons in business, on and off-Island, are what she believes in. "I have to be in an ethical environment where I believe in what I represent," she said. "I don't spin my wheels. I try to work smarter and I've learned in business that you have to provide for yourself."

Cultural preservation and restoration was a key element of her candidacy. Ms.



photo by Mark Alan Lovewell

Cheryl Andrews-Maltais will lead Aquinnah Tribe.

Andrews-Maltais must replace herself as tribal historic preservation officer while taking care of the job's responsibilities until being sworn in as chairman on Jan. 6.

"There are about five cultural preservation issues that I would call fires, they're in play and require attention within sixty days or less. They would be things like archeological sites that are in danger of being destroyed and we're trying to keep them at bay until we get the agency involved to understand the importance of the information in the site. You don't get to go back later and say, 'Oh, can you put this 8,000-year-old relic back where it was now?' It's gone," she said.

She is focusing on those issues while getting up to speed on matters now before the council and on the chairman's duties that will be her responsibility when she take office.

Last month, Ms. Andrews-Maltais defeated the incumbent chairman, Donald Widdiss, in a 99-48 vote. She believes the transition process with Mr. Widdiss will be smooth despite year-end interruptions because "we don't go anywhere after elections. We just move across the table. Don is still involved in tribal affairs and is part of the gaming corporation," she said, noting that having lost an election herself as council member in 2000, she knows "it stings a little at first, then you get over it and move on."

Looking forward, Ms. Andrews-Maltais' views promise what could be an interesting term. In addition to a desire to protect and enrich tribal culture, she said, "We have to work on good communication, resource sharing and revenue building. Public funds are drying up. We can't depend on grants and we can't pay a tourist-level standard of living for basic services. We share the same issues in that regard with everyone in the county."

Ms. Andrews-Maltais has been up-close and personal with the litany of failed tribal enterprises and partnerships. She and her husband Jim were hired while living off Island to manage a Sears store planned by the tribe. They relocated to the Island to manage a store that was never built.

"We were affected in every way possible," she said. "Sears actually hired us and told us that things were moving along because that's what they were being told. They're shipping stuff to the tribe and the tribe doesn't have the land yet. None of it was happening. None of it was well planned, executed or communicated. At the same time, roadblocks were going up in West Tisbury zoning and at the Martha's Vineyard Commission."

They moved to the Island and built a house in Edgartown in 1999 shortly after daughter Samantha, now 11, was born. "Again a case of turmoil and issues in the tribe," she said. "We relied on the expertise of people we had hired to do economic development. If the work isn't done well or completely, they leave and we have to pick up the pieces."

Following the Sears debacle, Ms. Andrews-Maltais served on tribal council, became tribal personnel administrator in 2001, then took on her cultural preservation job with the support of her husband Jim Maltais, an Island builder. She values thoughtful entrepreneurship she sees in the tribe's nascent relationship with the Seneca Nation for the gaming initiative and vows to use that approach in future tribal enterprises.

A Dartmouth native, Ms. Andrews-Maltais was not raised in a tribal environment,

though she summered and spent holidays at Aquinnah and attended tribal meetings with her mother, an active member of the tribe.

“We were the only Indian family in Dartmouth, which was kind of unique,” she said. “People thought maybe I was Hispanic, they had no reference point for Native American people. But my mother did, she was the commissioner of Indian Affairs for the commonwealth in the Dukakis administration.

“She was active in all Indian affairs as well as our tribe,” Ms. Andrews-Maltais said. “For example, the town had an Indian likeness in its logo and she suggested that if the town was going to use an Indian, it should look like one. That helped raise awareness.”

After completing high school in 1977, she attended college for a year in Ohio.



“It wasn’t for me. I was young and missed the coast, the ocean,” she said. “My parents were not thrilled that I didn’t stay in college. Both brothers and my sister Naomi had all graduated from college.”

Shortly after returning to Dartmouth, she moved to Boston and began a twenty-year business career working principally in sales for four companies in disparate industries: modeling, mortgage brokering, a management consulting firm to Fortune 100 companies and finally with a logistics management consulting firm in the trucking transportation industry. She always worked from the ground up to management positions, finally becoming New England regional sales manager for the logistics company, overseeing national accounts.

Her personal code required her to be straight up with her employer.

“I knew I always had a job in logistics but my ultimate goal was to work with my tribe and I told my company that,” she said.