Meet Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee Members

Buford Rolin and Dr. Judy Goforth Parker

The Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee (TLDC) is an Indian Health Service committee made up of 13 elected tribal officials, one member at large, and one IHS co-chair. The committee provides recommendations to the IHS on distribution of special diabetes funding, and direction on diabetes issues. It gives tribal input to other government agencies and tribal organizations on issues related to diabetes.

This issue of *Health for Native Life* features Buford Rolin, Vice Chairman of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians in Alabama, and Dr. Judy Goforth Parker, Elected Legislator of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma.

What motivates you to fight diabetes?

Buford: My mother had diabetes. I remember being twelve years old and watching her give herself insulin injections. We thought she was giving herself an immunization! Sometimes, I helped give her injections. She was in and out of the hospital. She lost her toes. Later, she lost her right foot, then her right leg.

I have diabetes and am insulin-dependent. I know that by taking care of myself, I can have a long, healthy life.

I would like people to know they can prevent diabetes, or manage it to live long, healthy lives.

Judy: My father fights diabetes daily. His fight against diabetes motivates me, and keeps me strong. I remember when he was diagnosed. Now, I compare his health with others in his age group who do not have diabetes.

I am also motivated by those I see in our health care facility. Sometimes, they feel

hopeless. I want them to know there is hope!

Do you take care of yourself?

Buford: I travel a lot, so it is a challenge. I know I can't depend on just my diabetes medicines to stay healthy. So, I try to walk four times a week, two miles. Sometimes when I'm traveling, I can only walk for 15 minutes. But, I walk!

I watch what I eat. I eat about 1900 calories each day. I've lost some weight. I try to stay away from sugar and limit carbohydrates. I'm a firm believer in portion control.

Judy: Taking care of myself is a holistic process. Spiritually, I stay connected to God. I stay connected to my family and friends. Part of my emotional health is the love from and for my family. Physically, I try to get enough rest. I try to eat nutritious food. My life-long goal is to keep my weight in the normal range. As I get older, I'm seeing that to do this, I must be careful about what I eat and how much I eat! I also am physically active for about 250 minutes each week.

Is it important for a Tribal Leader to be a role model?

Buford: People say to me, "Gee! You've been such a role model!" I tell them, "You can do it! Don't stop exercising!" If I can affect someone else's life to make a positive change, that's what I consider success.

Judy: Yes. I believe it is important for tribal members to see Tribal Leaders having healthy life-styles.

Can the fight against diabetes be won? How?

Buford: Diabetes prevention begins at home. If each one of us, in our homes, does not take steps to prevent diabetes, no one will! That's the only way we will survive. Our families need to start sitting down together at home, and having meals. We need to eat healthy foods. We need to take the time to be together and practice healthy life-styles.

Judy: The key is with our youth and education. We must help them understand that they can prevent diabetes. And, for those who have diabetes, we must help them understand that they can control the disease rather than be controlled by it. We are in a war against diabetes and, yes, it can be won!