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Cigarettes, gambling seen as path to greater success

By MICHAEL BEEBE
News Staff Reporter
5/19/2004



ROBERT KIRKHAM/Buffalo News

Scott Maybee is a practicing Mormon who doesn't smoke and doesn't gamble.

But Maybee, part of the new generation of Seneca merchants, believes that businesses like cigarettes and gambling will help develop new industries to overcome centuries of discrimination and neglect against Native Americans.

"There is no better business opportunity than an addictive consumable," said Maybee, whose speech is sprinkled with theories he learned earning a management degree from Canisius College.

"I'm pro gaming," Maybee added. "I like it because it's going to grow a nation. It will help generate economic development."

A vigorous looking 31 and a former competitive swimmer at Canisius, Maybee was a stock broker when his sister asked him to help with a cigarette business.

"I did a marketing plan for her and helped her get set up," he said in an interview at his three-story office on the Cattaraugus Reservation. "It grew so quickly. So I jumped into it feet first and blindfolded."

Maybee has since bought out his sister, and his Injun Enterprises now employs 110 workers selling cigarettes, and Costa Rican-blend coffee. He also wholesales native brand cigarettes, runs a call center and information technology operation.

"I want to have a national presence, a role in economic development in Indian Country on a national level," he said. "Everything I do I has to be synergistic. One plus one equals three."

"I remember when I was 6 or 7 years old, the Seneca Reservation was genuinely a Third World country," he added. "We're still at the bottom of the list, but we've come a long way."

Maybee is chairman of the Seneca Sovereign Partnership, a business group that supports

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the Seneca campaign against New York taxation.

"The fight is not just for my business to stay alive," he said, "but protecting our rights as a sovereign nation."

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Keyword

Maybee said he would like to see economic development and per capita payments for the 7,300 Senecas come from the nation's gambling profits.

"It should help people get on their feet, climb out of poverty but not totally support them," he said. "The territory has too long a history with alcoholism and drug abuse to be handing out big checks."

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"You want to break the cycle," he said of the example he hopes to set. "If Scott Maybee can do it, I can do it."

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