Now-recognized Tunica-Biloxi Tribe working to become self-sufficient

By MELINDA SHELTON
Advocate state writer

MARKSVILLE — Operating on a 132-acre reservation just off Louisiana 1 here, members of the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe are steadily making progress in their attempt to become a self-sufficient, progressive Indian nation.

Since achieving federal recognition in 1981, the Tunica-Biloxi people, guided by their chairman, Earl Barbry, and a supportive tribal council, have made headway in developing the reservation and improving services to tribe members.

Federal recognition, which took 10 years for the tribe to obtain, opened the door to progress through federally funded grants for improved housing, education benefits, and administrative and health programs.

The Tunica-Biloxi, which is one of three federally recognized Louisiana tribes, has become a progress-oriented group with the potential to be a leader among other tribes in the nation, according to some officials.

Finance officer Bill Scott, a non-Indian hired in October to oversee the tribe’s almost $1 million annual budget, described the tribe’s ongoing growth as being “like the birth of a nation.”

“Today’s Tunica-Biloxi Indian, instead of working with a tomahawk and bow and arrow, is working with the computer and is getting into the mainstream of modern society,” Scott said during a recent interview at the reservation. “The tribe is in the process of acquiring an industry that will benefit the entire community and not just the tribe, and is working to keep improving itself and its people.

“This very well could be a model tribe for the whole United States. It’s a small tribe, but by establishing a respectable business and following sound management practices it could become a leader here in Louisiana and among other tribes — even larger, longer-organized tribes.”

For the tribe and its leaders, being thrust into modern society has not come without “blood, sweat and tears,” according to Barbry, who recently was re-elected to his fourth two-year term as chairman. The fight to gain federal recognition was the top priority for many years, Barbry said, because with recognition came federal funding for needed programs and “we could take the first step to becoming self-

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