

Computerized identification on its way to Blackfeet Country

By John McGill

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Well, all it looks like, really, is a normal looking computer with a monitor and an extra, blue colored box attached to it. There's another one that's smaller, and the pair constitute the core of the Blackfeet Tribe's new identification system.



Yes, it's really him. No doubt Donna Yellow Owl and Wanda Glaze already know their tribal vice chairman is Sassy Running Crane. But with the Tribe's new technology, officials at the border can learn, via a fingerprint scan, that the vice chair or any tribal member is really who he says he is. Photo by John McGill

"It's a unique system that is state-of-the-art," said Roger "Sassy" Running Crane, vice chairman, Tuesday, Oct. 18. "We invested in it because of the border crossing to enhance the Blackfeet Nation at the border."

Wanda Glaze explained the Tribe bought the new identification system last month from Veritec Inc. of Golden Valley, Minn. It was delivered to tribal headquarters Monday, Oct. 17, and installed, and staff members were trained in its operation.

The main computer stays in Blackfeet Country, but the sister machine is destined to be stationed at the border. "It's so when people go across the border, if there are any questions, they can use the computer to check the person's ID with a fingerprint," said Glaze.

The system was still being set up and tried out last week, and when it's fine tuned, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council will decide on policies to direct its use. At present, it is expected that at least all enrolled tribal members will be permitted to have an identification card made for them, one that contains an assortment of data about the member, including a fingerprint record.

At the border, the sister machine only allows access to the fingerprint program. A print reader attached to the computer scans a person's print and the data is sent to the mother machine in Browning. At the border the screen reads either "verified" or "not verified." All the rest of the data is securely stored by the Blackfeet Tribe in Browning.

Glaze estimated the system would be operational by the end of the month. "The Blackfeet are the first tribe in the United States with this system," said Running Crane. "Lamar Associates, who are also working on the Blackfeet Department of Public Safety, recommended Veritec," he added.

"We need to decide who gets the cards and who uses the system, and that's the decision of the Tribal Council, especially with the issue of the descendants," Running Crane said. Glaze said the BTBC would consider whether or not to extend the identification system to descendants of tribal members, as well as members of the bands of the Blackfoot Confederacy.