

LELAND DEBE

Born on the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation, Lee is an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Lee demonstrates a sincere appreciation for those things of the creators' hand and then nurtured by Sacred Mother Earth. Lee has worked for the benefit of Indian people in many capacities, most recently by his tireless contribution to the Gitigaan Gardening Program. Nurturing original Iroquois White Flint Corn, assorted vegetables, world class strawberries, sweetgrass, tobacco, sage, and champion blueberries are just some of his many talents. Lee and his wife Norma have helped with about 75 gardens on the reservation.



Receiving his early education in Carlton County schools, Lee was a motivated and accomplished student with a special interest in science, and it is said an innate curiosity for how all mechanical things work-just sneak into his yard in the night.

In the warrior tradition, Lee entered the U.S. Army as a teenager and has proudly given 20 years of distinguished performance. Holding positions of service as 1st Sergeant of several combat units in Vietnam, Lee has contributed that unique expertise which won him meritorious recognition and the respect of his men. That respect continues into his retirement back on the reservation with the phone ringing almost continuously during time of concern and crisis.

Personal Statements:

The son of a disabled war veteran, I grew up in the post-depression era where good jobs were scarce and having enough of anything was a constant preoccupation. It was not a good time for the country as a whole, but for people on reservations, it was truly the worst of times. The idea of hard work, meaningful conversation, sharing with friends and relatives, of growing as much of our own food as we possibly could, and hunting game animals to sustain ourselves were personal values set in my character for life.

My life's experience has taught me that we do have a spiritual responsibility to guide and direct those gifts that beget and sustain us as human beings. That's fundamental in our beliefs, as fundamental as the air we breathe and food we eat. We all have an obligation to share this

knowledge with those who follow us; in the same way that we have learned it from our own elders.

I think there are numerous ways to show academic and other forms of community intelligence. Indians have contributed three quarters of this country's agricultural products, the very fabric of its democratic constitutional conventions, a sustainable and healthy culture for several hundred thousand years, and modern research has yet to discover an herbal medicine or practice unknown to our ancestors. Playing golf on the moon is nothing in comparison to teaching a child how to fish, of cleaning it, of cooking it, of giving part of it to someone who needs it as much as you, and of thanking the creator for the opportunity.