

## PRAYER BREAKFAST

# Leaders face same problems as everyone

By WILL CHABUN  
Leader-Post

The first woman to lead the large, innovative La Ronge First Nation.

The president of the band's business arm.

A member of SaskPower's board of directors.

Well, and good, but the woman behind all these distinctions wants people to know that leaders like her still face the same problems that beset everybody — and must find their ways out of them.

Describing what she's learned in her life to the 41st annual Saskatchewan Prayer Breakfast, Tammy Cook-Searson, told how she worked as a social worker for the province, then for her band, before she found herself at a political meeting and accepted a friend's offer to nominate her for band councillor — one of 47 people vying for only four posts.

But this veteran marathoner — she's even done 60-kilometre "ultra-marathons" — has a saying: "You don't stop until you're past the finish line," so she ran in the next council election.

Whereupon another life lesson: take care of the small stuff.

With less than an hour to go before the polls closed, she and her husband went out to find voters who hadn't yet marked their ballots. Her husband brought one and she brought two.

"And I got in by three votes!" Cook-Searson told a packed house at the Conexus Arts Centre Wednesday morning.

And after she'd decided to run for band chief, something unexpected came up: pregnancy.

Should she drop out of the race? She asked her mother-in-law, a



BRYAN SCHLOSSER / Leader-Post

Chief Tammy Cook-Searson of the LaRonge First Nation spoke Wednesday at the Saskatchewan Prayer Breakfast in Regina.

thoughtful woman, who replied, "Whatever the will of the Lord is, that's what will happen."

Cook-Searson stayed in the race — and won, her lesson being that it's better to take things as they come rather than worry about them.

Cook-Searson has known much tragedy, too, like the death by drowning of her first son. "I felt a spirit came through me, so I felt he'd gone to a good place".

This and the death (by suicide) of a sister eventually led her to a therapist, one so skilled and helpful

that she recommends counselling to all in attendance.

This gave her an appreciation for the impact of mental illness and also for therapies to avoid or minimize it.

"I should have reached out sooner — but I did. And I'm stronger today than I was before."

She's also learned to take joy in the natural beauty of the world around her and the therapeutic power of regular exercise.

"Run" she counselled. "And feel the vibration of the Earth."