

# 'That's my hope and dream'

## LEADERSHIP continued from front page

Robertson, who served on Tribal Council as secretary.

In 1985, Cheryle A. Kennedy and Eula Petite won seats on Tribal Council and joined Harrison and Robertson, marking the first time that four women sat on Tribal Council.

In 1986, Tribal Elder Dorothy Greene replaced Kennedy on Tribal Council and Tribal Elder Val Grout made her debut on Tribal Council in 1987.

In 1989, Wilmadene "Tuff" Butler was appointed to Tribal Council joining Harrison, Robertson and Grout to once again have four women.

Tribal Elder Margaret Provost, who is credited along with Merle Holmes and Marvin Kimsey as having been the driving force behind the Tribe being restored to federal recognition, was elected for the first time in 1990.

Only two women – Harrison and Grout – served on Tribal Council from September 1994 through September 1995.

Tribal Elder June Sherer was elected to Tribal Council for the first time in September 1999 and Valorie (Robertson) Sheker was elected in September 2002. Angie Blackwell was elected in September 2004 and Tribal Elder Kathleen Tom was elected the following year.

Harvey was elected to Tribal Council in September 2013 and Tonya Gleason-Shepek was elected in 2014. Brenda Tuomi won a seat on Tribal Council in 2015.

This year, former Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George became the 16th woman to serve on Tribal Council – compared to 30 men – since the Tribe's Restoration in 1983 when she was elected on Sept. 10. Her election places her on Tribal Council with Kennedy, Harvey, Gleason-Shepek and Tuomi, and marks the first time that five women have served simultaneously.

Harrison and Kennedy are the only women to serve the Tribe as chair. Harrison served six years and Kennedy served 11 years.

Mark Mercier, Henry Petite, Chris Mercier and current Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno are the only other Tribal members to serve as chair.

## Ground-breaking work

Harrison, who served on Tribal Council uninterrupted from April 1984 through September 2001, said that when she was elected, the Tribe had just achieved Restoration and Tribal Council had ground-breaking work to accomplish, such as regaining Reservation land and putting the Tribe on firm financial footing.

"We had one goal – Restoration," said Harrison. "Everybody had one mind. Nobody asked for any money because we didn't have any. We all worked."

## The first female majority



Cheryle A. Kennedy



Brenda Tuomi



Tonya Gleason-Shepek



Denise Harvey



Kathleen George

Harrison said she could not explain what it meant to her to be elected to Tribal Council and then to be asked to serve as chair as a woman in the early 1980s.

"It was a new day when we got restored," said Harrison. "So I look back on it now and to be elected to as high an office as that is an honor that you can't describe."

"It feels like a very natural progression to me," Blackwell said. "My mother (Candy Robertson) was on Tribal Council for the first 10 years of Restoration, so I've always seen women in leadership roles. If anything, I am surprised that it took so long to reach this point. I think women typically embody many of the characteristics of a strong leader: strong communication skills, a broad perspective and the ability to multi-task, among others. That's not to say men do not share these characteristics, but this is why I expect to see more and more women on Tribal Council in the future."

Tom, who served from September 2005 through September 2014, said she is looking for the women on Tribal Council to focus on the needs of the membership.

"I'm absolutely thrilled that there are five women," said Tom. "I think that with five women on there it is my hope that they truly focus on what are the needs and what are the problems of the Tribe. My hope is that they start really realizing that they as a group of five women, they can really do some moving and shaking. It's all up to them."

Tom said she hopes to see the women on Tribal Council be leaders.

"I think that they should step out and be that lead and show people that they are working together, that they can figure out what the needs are and take us as a Tribe to that next level," said Tom. "That's my hope and dream."

Grout, who served on Tribal Council off and on from September 1987 through September 2004, said

her family was always led by males, but that she sees a need for both genders on Tribal Council.

"It takes a mixture to make a good government," said Grout. "When I was growing up my Dad (DeWalt Houck) was the decision-maker for our house. My Dad made all the decisions for our house and Mom (Arvella Houck) was the one that took care of the home and us kids."

Although Grout admits her belief system is a bit old-fashioned, she said she is leaning the other way when it comes to national politics.

As America is poised to potentially elect its first female president, Grout said it is a person's temperament that is most important when it comes to being a leader.

"I hope she's strong enough," Grout said of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. "I think it takes somebody really strong to run our country, but it takes somebody who has control of their personality and control of themselves to run any form of government branch. So in this case, yes, I think the woman would do a better job."

## New role models

Tom said we are witnessing history on a national and Tribal level when it comes to female leaders.

"Mrs. Clinton is going to have to prove herself," said Tom. "I think she has it tougher because of who she is and because she's female. I think this is historic what is happening now and if she does get elected, I think things are really going to change nationally."

"I hope our young women take a look at that because it is really historic and not just at the national level, but the Tribal level as well."

"We are the givers. We are the nurturers. We are the people who really think of families and children and what is in their best interest. It makes me feel very hopeful."

Tom said this development is the vision that her father, Tribal Elder and former Tribal Council member Leon Tom, and other Elders have

been dreaming about.

"I see a real movement because of the vision that our Tribal Elders had that our kids would be educated," said Tom. "You can see it. They (younger, newly elected Tribal Council members) have a different way of thinking about things so I see it coming full circle. I'm just thankful that those Elders and Tribal Council members had this vision."

As a woman who was interested in being a part of her Tribe's government, Tom said it was Harrison, a trailblazing female leader in Indian Country, who inspired her and made her believe she could serve on Tribal Council.

"Kathryn is the one that gave me hope that I could be a council member, that I could do that," said Tom. "I could follow in her footsteps. Here is a woman that is the head of the Tribe, the chairman, and she's so strong and she advocates for her people and she works for her people and her Tribe. So I always have admired Kathryn because of that. She never lost focus of who she was working for and it was always for the Tribe. She worked tirelessly and fought battles for what was in the best interest of all of us."

Tom said she sees Provost in the same light.

"They were always thinking of the people first, the Tribe first and what is in the best interest for all," said Tom. "It took a lot of fortitude to do what Margaret did and the dream that she had and the dream that came true for all of us."

"I think that the message is equally important for young men and women," Blackwell said about a female majority. "That is we all have valuable contributions to make. Not everyone wants to take on a leadership role such as an elected position, but we should all believe we can make an impact and we should all act on that belief. Everyone should examine their talents and find a way to contribute to the overall community. It doesn't have to be through elected office, but you can find a way."

Harrison cautiously offered advice to the new female majority on Tribal Council.

"Whatever your qualifications were to run, you need to follow through on that," said Harrison. "You need to be in touch with the people you said you cared about. Think things through yourself – don't be like a sheep. Be true to yourself because once it's done it's done, and there is no going back. I think you need to depend on prayer."

"There is no blueprint for any Tribe because we are all so different. We have to look at our membership and do what's best."

And now that the glass ceiling has been shattered when it comes to a female majority, it may repeat itself on Tribal Council often in the coming years.

The Youth Council recently appointed by Tribal Council has a 50/50 split between young men and young women. ■