

Running Chemawa's Physical Plant



Mr. Bray takes time from a busy schedule to lean back and explain a few things about how the physical plant is run. (Photo by Pat Kvasnikoff)

Plant Management Director, Rex Bray and his assistant, John Baker, both won certificates of special achievement for their work in running the physical plant. But what does it mean to run the physical plant at Chemawa?

"It means being responsible for all the buildings, grounds, utilities, water, electricity, phones, heat, sewers and custodial maintenance--plus fire protection and insect and rodent control," Bray said.

"We have 122 buildings, counting garages, under our department right now," added Baker. "They add up to

over a million square feet of floor space." He added that they are also responsible for over a mile of high-pressure steam lines that honeycomb the campus, and for the care of Chemawa's streets too.

Plant Management's little "kingdom" covers 300 acres. The main campus and the cemetery account for 50, and the other 250 are leased out for farming. "The money we get from them goes back to the students and the school," Bray said. At one time Chemawa controlled over 460 acres.

Plant Management's two biggest headaches are vandalism and plain old wear and tear. "Vandalism is the main headache," Bray said. "Bray said. "We have 25 to 35 thousand dollars of vandal-caused damage every year. 1971 was the worst year and it has been getting a little better since then."

Both Bray and Baker hate to see the vandalism occur, because the money that is spent to repair it could be used to make the school better and buy things for the students if it did not have to be used to fix damages.

The wear and tear comes from the fact that Chemawa has been on its present site since 1885, and much of the equipment is the original material.

"The normal life for water and sewer lines is about 40 years, and some of ours are over 80 now," Baker commented. "When we were repairing a line this fall, we found it was made out of old hand-casted, egg-shaped

pipe."

"We are patching patches on patches right now," Bray added, and not many people know it, but Chemawa had electricity before the City of Salem did."

Bray said that the physical plant tries to use every part of the campus as an educational facility. Students



Mr. Baker explains one of his pet worries--how to keep the pipes going for a few more years. Photographer Pat Kvasnikoff catches him in a rare moment of relaxation.

have studied control of high-pressure steam at the steam plant, and advanced vocational and shops students have found additional training and jobs in helping care for the campus. Presently there are 22 positions in Plant Management.

Plant Management's next project will be to clean up and restore the cemetery, which has just been placed under their jurisdiction. "There's no water to irrigate there at present, Baker said, but he added that they plan to restore it as nicely as possible because, "that's one part of Chemawa that ought to remain forever."

Another big responsibility will be overseeing the construction of the new school. Both Bray and Baker did "a heck of a lot" of research on the engineering plans for the new Chemawa, and they will be responsible for seeing to it that all the construction is up to standard and reporting on its progress and quality to Superintendent Ed Lonefight. At least, they said, they won't have to fight with any more hand-casted, egg-shaped pipes.



Plant Management's work began a long time ago--This early picture shows the first work done at Chemawa, clearing away the land for the present campus after fire destroyed the old Forest Grove site in 1884. Note the railroad tracks that are still a problem today. (Photo courtesy Chemawa Archives)