

NOTICES

Van Peters Retires After 47 Years in Education, Including Five with SVS

by Brent Merrill

Siletz Valley School Administrator Van Peters recently announced his retirement and will step out of his life in education for the first time in 47 years.

Peters, a Washoe Tribal member, started the school in Siletz five years ago at the request of the Siletz Tribal Council.

According to Peters, the school district was going to close the school in Siletz and did so following the 2002-03 school year.

"Tribal Council contacted me during the spring of 2003 to see if I would

write a grant to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) for a charter school," said Peters. And with that request, he began to put the school together.

First on the agenda was a series of community meetings to see if there was support for the school. Not only did the community support the idea, but ODE did as well by approving the grant for the charter school in June 2003.

Peters then set about gaining the approval of the Lincoln County School District and submitted an application

for the charter school in July of that year. After negotiations concluded, the application was approved at a school board meeting in late July.

Peters attended the meeting with the late Craig Whitehead.

"They (the members of the school board) indicated to us that they were just going to review the application, not approve it then," he explained. "Then, at the last minute, they changed their mind and voted and approved it."

Peters said he was relieved, but knew their work was ahead. The newly approved school had just five weeks to open in time for the 2003-04 school year.

"When we walked in the building at the end of July, it was an empty building," he said.

Tribal Council then appointed a school board.

"Tribal Council said, 'Do you think you can do it?'" said Peters. "And I said, 'Oh, yeah.'"

"Van was committed to get the school up and running," said Tribal Chairman Delores Pigsley. "He surpassed that goal for the benefit of the Tribe as well as the community."

Council approved a loan of \$35,000 to purchase supplies, materials and equipment. Peters said the local school district had left the building empty except for a few desks that had been stashed by a former maintenance worker.

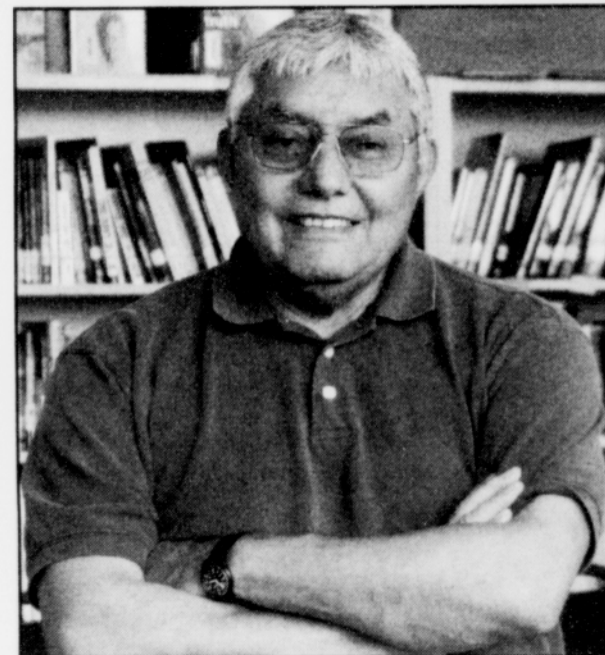
Peters said community members pitched in, painting and cleaning up the building while supplies were being ordered and class schedules drafted.

Peters said the work of putting in place administrative procedures, creating school policies, installing student record management protocol, securing insurance policies, negotiating food service agreements, planning for student transportation and hiring staff were all priorities.

The school opened Sept. 11, 2003, with 147 students – just six weeks after the application had been submitted.

Enrollment has been steady, according to Peters.

"I think it has become a pretty successful program overall," he said.



Peters also helped re-open the local high school in 2005 in much the same process as opening the K-8 school. After submitting the grant, having it approved and submitting the application to the school district and having it approved, he targeted Antioch University in Seattle. The university partnered with the school and that partnership allowed the new high school to also become an early college academy.

The academy distinction allows Siletz Valley Early College Academy students to be part of the Early College initiative. Since then, the academy also has partnered with Oregon State University and Oregon Coast Community College.

Peters said 70 students are enrolled in the high school this year and a full athletic program is being offered. In June of last year, the first graduating class of high school seniors received diplomas from a high school in Siletz for the first time in 24 years.

"We have had great support from the parents, community members, Tribal administration and especially the Tribal Council over the years," said Peters. "A community without a school is not really a community."

The Tribe agrees with Peters.

"Van Peters was a great asset to the community school," said Pigsley. "His relationship with the Tribe goes way back many years when he was the education director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We wish him well in his retirement."



Van Peters sorts through five years of paperwork for Siletz Valley School and Siletz Valley Early College Academy. (photos by Diane Rodriguez)

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