

TRIBAL MEMBER NEWS



Shirley Walker and Angela Ramirez



Shirley Walker, Donna Kessinger and Ed Ben

Photos by Brent Merrill

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The project looked to honor individuals who have had an impact on the lives of Native Elders in the Tribal community. According to Heroes Project literature, the project hoped to honor people who dedicated their time, talent and energy to help Native Elders solve local problems, share cultural traditions and build stronger communities. The project was developed by the late Dr. Alan Allery as a way to recognize Elders and those who serve Elders nationally.

The National Resource Center seeks to identify and increase awareness of evolving Native Elder health and social issues and empower Native people to develop community-based solutions.

Ben, Kessinger and Ramirez were nominated for the honor in March of this year. Final selections for the award were made in October. Honorees received a plaque and certificate of honor.

Ben, 80, is a leader in the Tribal community for many reasons, but he was honored specifically for teaching his culture to future generations and hauling wood to fellow Elders in need.

"Ed is a leader in our community and a traditional dancer, drum maker, great father, husband, uncle and brother," said Walker at the Restoration event. "He is a great influence to our young people and many look up to him. He assists our young people in learning our language and traditions."

Walker talked about his life.

"He is a retired employee of the State of Oregon and a Navy veteran who has volunteered his services to our Tribe for many years," said Walker. "Ed helped write the Constitution for our Tribe when we were working on Restoration."

Walker talked about how Ed always helps out other Elders with their need for wood during winter months.

"In Oregon, one of our major sources of heat in our homes is a wood stove,"

said Walker. "Ed has hauled wood in his pickup truck to Elders in Oregon for many years, including the Salem area, throughout the Willamette Valley and throughout Siletz. The only thing he asked for was help unloading the wood."

Walker told those in attendance at the Restoration celebration that Ed's sons have and still do continue his work as well.

"Our children reflect us and Ed's family is a great representation of him and his wife, Delores," said Walker.

Tribal Elder Donna Kessinger received her plaque and her certificate at the Restoration celebration from Walker while standing next to Ben and Ramirez.

According to information published by the National Resource Center on Native American Aging in its highlights package, Kessinger "remembers that Indian women help each other; years ago Indian women helped each other can fruit, make jam and jelly and helped with sewing projects. Donna continues that tradition by delivering fish and apples (picked by her and her family members) to the Elders of the community. She visits Elders and talks to them. Donna brings joy to those around her. Donna Kessinger is a hero."

Donna's son, Vern Kessinger Jr., remembers his younger days being influenced by his mom. He said he admired her for many reasons – among them that she was a foster parent with an open heart.

"Just imagine opening your home to others that have been left alone," said Kessinger Jr. "My mother opened her heart and God was smiling over His children."

Kessinger Jr. believes he is a better person because of the way his mother raised him and that he is a good person today because his mother raised him to be one.

Walker told everyone about her daughter, Angela Ramirez, when it was her turn to receive her plaque and certificate.

"Angela has worked for the Siletz Tribe since 1997 in various departments," said Walker. "She has worked with five

Tribes in Oregon, the State of Oregon and the State of Washington to sponsor a caregiver's conference. She helped organize the first conference in just three months by communicating through e-mail and through two official planning meetings with all those involved. She has received special recognition from the other Tribes and the leaders from the State Unit on Aging – that program offers support to caregivers of Tribal Elders and Elders that are primary caregivers of minor children."

Walker said Ramirez works many hours beyond what is required by the Tribe to fulfill her job requirements and that she volunteers on her own to help Elders.

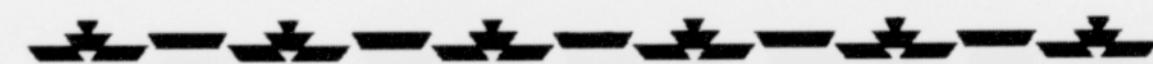
"Angela made two Pendleton vests so that the Elders could use them as raffle

prizes," said Walker about Ramirez's volunteer projects. "Her work as a seamstress is a great help in putting together regalia for many Tribal members. Angela helps because she enjoys seeing the young people and adults wearing regalia that she has helped design."

Angela has two children - Ashliegh and Cristian. Ashliegh is a member of the Siletz Royalty and Cristian dances and drums.

Walker made the presentation in front of the large crowd so these Tribal heroes could have an audience worthy of their service to the Tribe.

Everybody has a hero. Walker told us about three of ours.



New System Will Centralize Tribal Member Information

by Robert Arce-Torres, TCIS Project Coordinator

As a Tribal member, do you ever get tired of going to each department to update information about yourself? Well, read on about an upcoming project that by September 2009 will be in production and working for you.

The Tribal Centralized Information System Project (TCIS) is funded by the Administration for Native Americans for Social and Economic Development Strategy. After completion, various departments will be able to share pertinent information that is located in multiple departments and in different formats, which makes it difficult to keep updated and consistent client and membership information.

The impact of the project will allow collection and storage of information for efficient and effective decision making on matters of Tribal governance, which include the provision of services in the areas of health, housing, employment,

family services, culture, history, education and Tribal records.

After research from the project staff on possible candidates, the system that was chosen to complete the project is from EagleSun Systems Product Inc. It's called the Tribal Assistance System (TAS). This provides Tribes and Tribal organizations the ability to create one central database of information for multiple departments.

The Enrollment Department will be the first department migrating to the new software system. We are in the process of customizing the software for the needs of the Siletz Tribe. Once we get the software completed, we will create a timeline as to when the system will be in place. So stay tuned for updates of this project.

The current staff for the TCIS project consists of Clint Muschamp, Ed Biancone and I with, of course, lots and lots of help from the entire Tribal staff and Tribal Council.