

TRIBAL MEMBER NEWS



TRADITIONAL DANCER – William "Chief Chewescla" DePoe always takes part in the Tribe's annual Nesika Illahee Pow-Wow as a member of the Color Guard and as a Golden Age dancer.

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the Navy. Chewescla and his sister, Charlotte, lived in Neah Bay with their mother, Marie Lafrance (Chipewa from Turtle Mountain Reservation) and their grandparents, Robert (Tututni) and Mary (Cheyenne) DePoe. Chewescla's Grandfather Robert was the son of Chief Charlie DePoe. Charlie DePoe is the namesake of the Depoe Bay area.

Chewescla's Grandfather Robert was a college educator known as Dr. Robert DePoe, who wrote to the Yaquina Bay News in 1933 to explain the origins of the naming of the Depoe Bay area.

"We owned the property where Depoe Bay is and it took its name from us," wrote Robert. "My father came to the first train into Yaquina Bay dressed in his Indian regalia as did other Indians for there was quite a celebration at Toledo Station. The passengers, mellowed by

wine and rich food, purchased my father's decorations, pie, etc., leaving him nearly stripped. He saw the opportunity of building a profitable business through selling Indian curios at Toledo depot and established himself there, thus getting the name "Depot Charlie." When I had earned my higher education degrees and decided to devote my time to teaching, as his son I would have been called Depot Robert. That didn't sound so well, so I changed my name to Robert DePoe."

Chewescla's parents, William, Sr. and Marie, met while attending Chemawa Indian Boarding School in Keizer, Ore. At Chemawa, Chewescla's parents were forbidden from speaking their traditional languages.

"They were told to be ashamed they were Indian," said Chewescla. "My dad never listened to them and was proud to be an Indian all of his life."

Chewescla was close with his father once he got a little older and like his father, he excelled as an athlete and a musician.

"I had a very good relationship with him after he recovered from his alcohol addiction," said Chewescla. "I was very proud of him."

Chewescla attended Cleveland High School in Seattle, excelling as a track athlete and football and basketball player. Chewescla's father, William, was a local high school hall of fame decathlete in Port Angeles, Wash., and played on the National Indian Basketball All-Star Team that once played a game against the Harlem Globetrotters.

According to Chewescla, his record marks in the high hurdles as an Eagle at Cleveland High still stand to this day. Even as an Elder, Chewescla enjoys basketball tournaments, jogging and also participates in the Tribe's ceremonial Run to the Rogue event every year.

"I participated in athletics all of my life," said Chewescla. "I was a four-year letterman in football, basketball and track. I tied one record and broke another one in the high hurdles."

After high school, Chewescla played on an AAU basketball team and several all-Indian teams and shared that his personal highlight was scoring 50 points in a game at the University of British Columbia.

Chewescla played the saxophone in high school and watched his father play in bands with the likes of Lawrence Welk, Tommy Dorsey and Lionel Hampton while growing up.

Chewescla's father, William, Sr., passed away Jan. 11, 1997, at age 84. William, Sr. was a Navy Veteran who survived World War II on the U.S.S. Wateree.

William, Jr. was given the name of "Chewescla" by fellow Siletz Tribal Elder, spiritual leader and cousin, Gilbert Towner, Jr., one year after the passing of his father. William, Sr. provided that his son, William, Jr. "Chewescla," would succeed him with the title of "Chief."

Pride and tradition seem to weave their way through the life of Siletz Tribal Elder Chief Chewescla DePoe like strands in an Indian water basket. They are working together, pride and tradition, to keep Chewescla strong, together and on the red road as he seeks his legacy.

"What stands out (today) is that I'm proud to be able to participate in the Run to the Rogue and dance in the Golden Age Northern Traditional competition at the Gathering of Nations Pow-wow (in New Mexico) and participate in the Fleet of Flowers on Memorial Day in Depoe Bay," said Chewescla.

He said he feels a connection to his father.

"It's a good feeling when I put on my regalia and get ready to dance at pow-wows," he said. "I can feel my dad's presence and I know he is proud of me that I am carrying on for him."

His traditional roots run deep into his family history and he uses this tradition as fuel for his strength.

"I am proud to be a Tribal Elder," said Chewescla. "It makes me proud to carry on my great-grandfather's, grandfather's and father's journey for them. I keep myself in good physical condition by regular running and being alcohol and drug free for the last 28 years. I am proud to make (public) appearances so the people will know that the DePoes are still here."

Chewescla said he thanks Creator for his good health.

As a young man, Chewescla supported his family with his carpentry skills and he spent 31 years building yachts for Delta Marine Industries. Chewescla's children are daughters Gail and Suzanne and sons William and Gary.

His advice to young Tribal members is not original, but it is meaningful and poignant.

"Don't make the same mistakes a lot of us Elders have," he said. "Stay away from alcohol and drugs. Be proud of your Indian blood and learn all you can about your traditions. You don't know how lucky you are to be able to have pow-wows – when I was young, pow-wows were against the law. Be proud of who you are and participate in Tribal functions."

So the next time you travel the Oregon Coast and pass through a little town along the Pacific whale's Northwest passage known as Depoe Bay, just know that there is a history there. It's a history that runs deep into the past and right through to the future. It's a history that features the area's first inhabitants, American Indian entrepreneurs, steam trains, sophisticated travelers, early settlers and a family of Chiefs.