

New cheerleading squad adds a spark to Siletz Valley basketball games

By Diana Wilsey, Teacher, Siletz Valley School

When I first came to Siletz Valley Schools from Washington to be the new fifth-grade teacher, I was blown away not only by the energetic and positive attitude of the newly hired teachers and the supportive and caring principal, but also by the school's athletic program.

The attendance at the younger league, middle school and high school football games was full of fans and community members. I loved going to all of the games and watching practically the whole town show up to support players.

The only thing I saw missing were the spirited cheerleaders to help fan the flames of the crowd's excitement.

When I talked to school principal/superintendent, Dr. Sam Tupou, about this lack of cheerleaders, he told me to start a squad. "Could I do that?" I thought to myself. It took me a few days to realize that yes, I could.

So I asked for help from the coaches, specifically Willie Worman and Tony Blomstrom – could they help me get going in the right direction? The first step to forming a cheerleading squad was to get uniforms so the girls not only looked like cheerleaders, but also felt like cheerleaders.

The road to fundraising was long and arduous, but with the help of the Siletz community, countless people and businesses like Fawn Metcalf, Dee-Ni Gifts and Georgia Pacific, the cheerleaders were able to fundraise 100 percent of the cost of the squad's uniforms before basketball season ended.

The cheerleaders brought a new dynamic and light to the basketball games. The loud and sassy cheerleaders, young ladies from the second through fifth grade, have noticeable confidence and positive attitudes shining through them.

Chesney Huerta, an A squad cheerleader in my fifth-grade class, told me that she has never before been a part of a team.

"I don't really like sports and so I never wanted to play. Cheerleading allows me to actually do something and be a part of something really fun. I love dancing and cheering," she said.



Diana Wilsey and the Siletz Valley Cheerleaders

Courtesy photo by Memories by Michelle (Michelle McKibbin)

The first few cheerleading games, the girls cheered in black leggings or shorts and a red Siletz T-shirt. They were adorable but yet confided in me that they didn't "feel" like real cheerleaders.

At the start of basketball season, we were still short more than half the cost of the uniforms and I was nervous that I would have to tell the girls they weren't getting uniforms this year. The raffle drawings during football season and the beginning of basketball helped bring in half the funds, but a lot more was needed.

Chinook Winds Casino Resort has an incredible program where they give funds to help schools and communities. Its generous donation of \$300 and a weekend package for a raffle item pushed the squad to continue finding new avenues to fundraise. Willie Worman helped set up a GoFundMe page on Facebook and we were able to raise \$500 from people all around the country.

At the homestretch of fundraising, Larry Parker approached me during half-time at a basketball game, saying he came specifically to watch the cheerleaders, and asked me how much money was still needed to fund the uniforms.

After a few other incredibly generous donations from Mike Garling, an Oregon educator who supports Siletz Valley Schools, and Butch Heller, we were only

\$200 shy. Larry came back 20 minutes later with a check for \$250. We were getting our uniforms! The girls were ecstatic and the following day, I ordered them.

The day the uniforms came in, a complete transformation was seen by not only me, but by the crowd. The girls yelled louder, their dance routines were sassier and a whole new confidence overtook them. They were finally seen as real cheerleaders and better yet, they felt like real cheerleaders.

The support from the community has been nothing but positive and generous. I have been told countless times how amazing the girls look and how beautiful they are.

Their cheers, which took several weeks to learn, are so loud and fun, the players sometimes have a hard time hearing the calls from their coaches, but according to the varsity girls basketball team, they love it and wouldn't change a thing.

Bringing a cheerleading squad to Siletz Valley Schools and volunteering to whip these girls into cheerleader shape has been an incredible blessing, but one I could not have done on my own.

Elizabeth Annunzio, a mom for one of my A squad cheerleaders, Chloe Annunzio, has been a valuable and supportive volunteer. She had been looking for a program to do with her young daughters and weeks

before the cheerleading flier went up at school, she was looking into an after-school cheerleading program in Newport.

"When I saw the signs that you were starting a cheer program, I was so excited. I wanted to find something I could do with my daughters and that we could actively do together," she said.

Elizabeth was at every practice watching and helping, eventually becoming a co-coach, whether she signed up for it or not. Some of our favorite cheers are ones she and her daughters found and practiced on weekends, then brought to teach us at our daily practices.

The help and energy I get from Elizabeth is wonderful and I love that I have someone I can count on to be there for me and help out in the little things.

Whether it's a kind word from a community member, Gatorade donated to the girls at the games by Patricia Mills or discounted food during the games from the Siletz Boosters, every member of this community has helped bring cheerleading its life and value.

I am honored to be a part of this community and I look forward to what the coming years have in store. I'm already projecting a much bigger squad and fundraising project for next year as I have plans to have cheerleaders at the home football, volleyball and basketball games.

Most Often Requested Numbers	Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians – 800-922-1399	Contract Health Services (CHS) – 800-628-5720	Chinook Winds Casino Resort – 888-244-6665
	Salem Area Office – 503-390-9494	Siletz Community Health Clinic – 800-648-0449	Chemawa Health Clinic – 800-452-7823
	Salem Finance Office – 888-870-9051	Siletz Behavioral Health – 800-600-5599	Bureau of Indian Affairs – 800-323-8517
	Portland Area Office – 503-238-1512		Website – ctsi.nsn.us
	Eugene Area Office – 541-484-4234		

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Siletz: 800-600-5599 or 541-444-8286
Eugene: 541-484-4234
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Portland: 503-238-1512

Narcotics Anonymous Toll-Free Help Line – 877-233-4287

For information on Alcoholics Anonymous: aa-oregon.org