

Lyle alumnus models resilience for next generation of grads

Lyle High School graduate talks about challenges, rewards of his college experience

By Deb Stenberg
For Lyle School District

History. Expectations. Perceptions. They can lift kids up. And, too often, they can sink kids' hopes.

But, every once in a while, a kid comes along and listens to his own heart — and his mom. Joey Nelson was one of those kids.

Nelson grew up and attended public school in Lyle, on the banks of the Columbia River. Like many small, rural schools, Lyle High School operated on a bare bones budget, managing to provide a few extracurricular athletics along with the core academic subjects.

Some of Nelson's peers went to college. A few high-achieving kids would go to a four-year university every year, sometimes even a highly-ranked one. For most, more often, there was a job at the local mill or a place in the military, or possibly a technical program.

Nelson is an enrolled member of the Yakama Nation, and things were even more complicated for Native students — those expectations, beliefs and history can be a difficult box to step out of. But Nelson's family had made a few changes to those expectations and beliefs.

His mom was tough on him as he was growing up, Nelson said, but she also encouraged him to seek a life better than hers. As she put it, he was a "colored man in a white man's world," so he had to work hard, and sometimes harder, to achieve what he wanted.

His mom's words stayed with him. He played sports and got good grades. He stayed out of trouble. He graduated in 2007 from Lyle

High School, at the top of his class.

He applied to a single college and was accepted on a full-ride scholarship. Here, too, his family had created a history for him to look to: His mom had taken some community colleges classes, and two aunts had earned college degrees a few decades before.

Into the unknown

Nelson arrived on the Central Washington University campus in the fall of 2007 with no clear outcome in mind, but he was curious and positive. Mostly, he knew that there was a lot more outside of his previous range of experience and he chose not to limit himself.

Fast-forward 14 years to the spring of 2021, Joey — now Joseph Nelson, M.D. — took time from an intense schedule to talk to a group of juniors and seniors at his old high school. Although many things remain the same at the school, technology and the COVID-19 pandemic had produced one big change. Instead of making an overnight trip, Nelson was able to join the group, which was split between home and the classroom, via a remote meeting program from his home in Seattle.

Nelson asked questions and prodded students to think about possibilities. He encouraged those with an interest in college to apply, emphasizing the availability of financial aid.

He addressed a frequent concern, the inevitable culture shock students feel going from a high school with 80 students to a campus housing more than 10,000 students. For many young people who have lived in a community where they've known their peers for most of their lives, making friends in a larger, often urban environment can seem overwhelming.

Nelson shared that, when faced with that situation,

he did what he knew and loved to do best. He took a basketball to a gymnasium on campus and, before long, found a group to play ball with regularly. "On a campus of that size, there are plenty of groups with varied interests. You'll find your people," he assured the students.

Now a second-year Family Medicine resident at the University of Washington in Seattle, Nelson shared the journey of self-discovery that brought him to a position as medical doctor at a nationally-respected hospital system that treats critically ill and injured patients from throughout the Northwest.

Sometimes, you don't know your own strengths

It's not surprising that Nelson didn't take the usual path on his way to his chosen career. Nelson wasn't one of those kids who always knew he wanted to be a doctor. He had no plans to major in a science field at all, for that matter. During his first year in college, he did what a lot of students do. He acclimated. He took prerequisites, the foundational classes he needed for whatever major and career path he pursued. He looked at options.

But it wasn't until he walked through a career fair at the college that he realized he might be interested in a career in science and decided to take a biology class. He found he had an affinity for it. Unlike so many people in medical careers, he didn't have the advantage of a rigorous high school science program with plenty of funding. As a result, he says he was simultaneously "terrified of science, but excited for the challenge."

With an open and engaging personality, he quickly found mentors who helped him build his network. He was named a Udall Scholar for his interest in tribal



Dr. Joey Nelson sets out cards during an event. The Lyle grad encouraged graduating seniors to stay open to the possibilities. Contributed photo

public policy and healthcare. After spending a summer in Boston participating in a research program through Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital, his interest in medicine grew stronger. Upon graduation from college, he worked in an emergency department in Yakima as a medical scribe for two years. He then applied to and was accepted at the University of Washington School of Medicine, where he earned his medical doctorate before starting residency.

Along the way, there were inevitable obstacles: Financial hurdles, cultural differences, and stereotypes, including oft-made racially charged statements: "You

only got here because you're an Indian," or "Must be nice to have free college tuition." The latter, Nelson explained, is based on a widely believed falsehood that Native Americans and Alaska Natives go to college for free.

In fact, very few NA/AI people make it to college, largely due to systemic barriers, lack of mentorship, and institutional racism, he said.

These days, Nelson's typical day is not for the faint of heart: Waking up early and having a quick cup of coffee before spending his next 12-14 hours seeing a diverse patient panel in his clinic at Harborview, managing those who are critically ill in the hospital, or learning from doctors who are experts in their field.

All this when he's not covering overnight shifts, delivering babies, or providing care to Alaska Natives in Juneau and the island village of Kake. He is an advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion at UW and is a mentor for others as they embark on their own journeys into medicine. His successes have awarded him with recognition through scholarship, publication, and leadership positions.

He continues to play basketball and is engaged to Dr. Claire Simon, another resident in his program. Their plans include devoting the early years of their careers to working in disadvantaged rural communities, after they've completed their training.

And, always, staying open to the possibilities, because there's no telling where they will lead.



NOW OPEN FOR DINING

Homemade specialties by Chef Joe Kosarek
Enjoy this one-of-a-kind artisan experience in The Dalles.
Open Wed-Sun. 4-9 pm
541-296-5666
www.baldwinsaloon.com

Thank you

We couldn't have done it without you!

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped staff clinics and the call center. Because of you, Hood River County has surpassed the **70% vaccination rate.**

Victoria Abbott
Carol Adams
Adewale Agboola
Aaron Albalah
Charlene Ames
Soleil Ammon
Russo Andrew
JoElla Anglin
Lynne Annett
Tim Arbogast
Yvonne Arbogast
Melissa Arndt
Kelly Asbridge
Jana Austin-Jacobson
Elsa Avila Castañeda
Laurie Babb
Craig Bachman
Mike Ballah
Judy Bankman
Karla Barajas
Tina Baresch
Nestor Barragan
Brian Barrett
Christine Barthmus
Megan Bassett
Andrea Baumann
Michele Beaman
Molly Beard
Ann Becker
Sarah Bellinson
Robert Benton
Cheryl Berger
Kassen Bergstrom
Ruth Berkowitz
Anne Bernard
Elaine Betts
Tor Bieker
Paul Blackburn
Jeff Blackman
Carol Blanus
Emilie Blevis
Barbara Blizzard
Agi Bofferding
Peg Bogard
Mary Bokovoy
John Boonstra
Eileen Brady
James Brauer
Jan Brauer
Grant Braun
Athelea Brevard
Bill Brewer
Jose Briones
Karen Broderick
Heather Brooks
Laila S Brown

Charles Bugge
Ally Bugliari
Suz Burd
Gabriela Bustos
Ryan Butler
Dominic Buttaccio
Julie Byers
Patricia Byrnes
Jennifer Calderilla
Stacey Campbell
Jeff Campbell
Janie Cardwell
Dave Carter
Maribeth Chambers
Joshua Channell
Megan Channell
Craig Chijate
Graham Clark
Quin Clarkson
Natalie Clay
Michael Clement
Nancy Clement
Jacob Cook
Kirsten Cook
Adam Cook
Patricia Cooper
Sarah Cordeiro
Erin Costello
Rachel Crowder
Paul Crowley
Ryan Cruse
Claire Culbertson
Mark Dane
Martha Daniels
Christian Daniels
Ana Davis
Laura Davis
Iaird Davis
Theo Davis
Megan Davis
Ben Davis
Linda Densmore
Greg Densmore
Joella Dethman
Miranda Dezurick
Mike Dicken
Jean Dills
Vanessa Lalli Dittenhofer
Greg Doan
Debra Dobbs
Margery Dogotch
Kevin Donald
Jane Duncombe
Marianne Durkan
Erik/Kathy Eastman
Christina Eastman

Maria Eby
Michelle Edwards
Tracie Egeland
Trish Elliott
Karen Enns
Kate Ensor
Mary Fassel
Ellisa Fellows
Guy Fenner
Jessalyn Fey
Melanie Finstad
Rhonda Fischer
Alison Fitts
Cathy Fitzpatrick
Beth Flake
Lorene Flaming
Silvia Flores
Luz Flores
Kay Floria
Nancy Foley
Chung Fong
Danielle Forsyth
Susan Froehlich
Mark Fuller
Rebekah Galvez
Cristina Garcia
Laura Garcia-Rangel
Anne Gehrig
Helene Geraci
Monika Gerde
Tally Godkin
Kathy Goe
Lori Golze
Luz Elena Gordian Valdez
Maggie Goter
Alexandra Goyette
Mikey Goyette
Josh Green
Charlotte Gregson
Trevor Gregson
Claire Griffin
Christy Grimm
Grace Grimm
Jose Gruart
Cristina Gudor
Brent Guinn
Genevieve Guinn
Colleen Haggerty
Sean Hallissey
Adele Hammond
Molly Harman
Laurel Harper
Jennifer Harris
Jenny Harris
Clint Harris
Alison Harrod

Lori Harrod
Michael Harrod
Sean Harrod
Jennifer Hart
John Hart
Kurt Harter
Jeff Heater
Kristi Heck
Gus Hedberg
Leah Hedberg
Nigel Heinemann
Taylor Heinemann
Debbie Hendrickx
David Henne
DeeDee Hennessy
Robin Henson
Lisa Henzler
Cathy Higgins
Jill Hilderbrand
Jan Holibaugh
Victoria Hopkins, PA
Francesca Huey
Tami Hukari
Fletcher Hukari
Jason Hume
Eva Hume
Jeff Hunter
Robert Imhoff
David Ingraham
Courtney Jackson
John Jacobson
Julia Johnson
Phil Johnson
Sirota Johnston
Matt Johnston
Leslie Jones
Nik Jones
Madeliene Jones
Henry Jones
Karen Joplin
Jen K
Brandon Kammer
Lindsay Kammer
Tim Keenen
Carrie Kennedy
Taylor Kennedy
Lindsay Kenyon
Leslie Kerr
Elizabeth Kinney
Amy Klee
Margaret Koenig
Nathan Koenig
Shannon Kossar
Gloria Kowalski
Joshua Kramer
Angela Krause

Trent Kroll
Zip (Michael) Krummel
Nate Kuder
Andre Landau
Gretchen Lape
Meghan Larivee
Anna-Louise Laxague
Tom Lebsack
Haley Lebsack
Marti LeFevre
Rossy Leon
Franklin Levin
Benjamin Lewit
Kathy Lien
Paul Lindberg
Temira Lital
Catherine Loke
Ruth Longland
Ruth Longland
Ruth Longland
Rosa Loreda
Pierce Louis
Kyle Lewis
Susan Lund
Carey MacNaughton
Kelly Mallon
Imogene Mankin
Rhice Mannelli Brewer
Scott Manning
Griselda Manzo De Garcia
Sara/John Marsden
Monica Marquez
Lucy Marquez
Sara Marsden
Theresa Martinez
Shawne Martinez
James Matthisen
Ashely Huckaby-May
Robin McArthur
Amy McCarthy
William McClure
Roxanne McClure
William McClure
Melissa McClurry
Kristen (Kris) McNall
Oisin McNulty
Juliana Mears
Suzanne Meierbachtol
Tony Meierbachtol
David Meriwether
Robin Merriam
Adam Mock
Katelyn Mock

Kaleb Moga
Rachel Montague
Noah Muruve
Terina Neal
Zeke (Ken) Neal
Deborah Neft
Barbara Nelson
Anna Neraas
Bonnie New
Pippa Newell
Patrick Newman
Bradley Nicholson
Bill Norris
Janet O'Sullivan
Karen O'Neill
Mike Oates
Tracy Olmstead
Josue Orozco
Elda Orr
Jeannie Oswald
Asalia Pacheco
Jane Palmer
Ben Pate
Barry Paul
Sorcha Paul
Danielle Peecher
Rae Peil
Les Perkins
Mary Peters
Robin Peterson
Ken Peterson
Finn Peterson
Brigitte Piniewski MD
Rich Polkinghorn
Grant Polson
Coral Hurlay-Polson
Tom Post
Audrey Price
Melanie Quigley
Alicia Ramirez
Loreto Ramos
Skjelse Rapoch
Jeff Rapoch
Becki Rawson
Patrick Rawson
Claire Rawson
Tim Rayle
Celeste Raymond
Jodi Ready
Meali Ready
Vince Ready
Maren Reed
Gary Regalbuto

Andrew Rehn
Sally Reichmuth
Chrissy Reitz
Alejandra Retamales
Anna-Louise Reysenbach
Loren Rike
Lissette Rivera
Brenda Rodriguez
Roger Roediger
Mason Romero
Parker Romero
Erika Roulier
Sandi Rousseau
Neil Rust
Stacy Rust
Julie Ryan
Hector Samkow
Kozen Sampson
Lisa Sandoval
Erika Santacrose-Ammon
Tuller Schricker
John Schule
Seri Schutt
Greg Shephard
Jean Sheppard
Jay Sherrerd
Dorothy Sherwood
Linda Shively
Christie Smith
Andrew Smith
Marilyn Smith
Susan Sorensen
Anna Sparkling-Beckley
Chase Sparkling-Beckley
Barbara Spezia
Jennifer Stager
Michael Steinbock
Isis Stenn
Josephine Stenn
Julie Strader
Garrison Strand
Chalice Stroebel
Julie Sturman
Bill Sturman
Emily Styles
Susan Sutherland
Scott Sutherland
Matthew Swihart
Elliott Tauscher
Karin Tauscher
Guy Tauscher
Monica Terres
Rob Thieman

Kelly Kai Tokunaga
Kassandra Toombs
Sareni Torres
Fred Trujillo
Lev Tsypin
Akela Tubbs
Taylor Tyynismaa
Kelsey Underwood
Greg Valitchka
David VanCott
Terri Vann
Allison Varga
Emily Vawter
Jan Veldhuisen
Jean Vercillo
Christopher Vincenzo
Dick Virk
Gina Visalli
Zoe Wagner
Christine Walls
Allison Walston
Denise Ward
Stuart Watson
Kathy Watson
Jeanie Watts
Renee Webb
Connor Webb
Erika Wellenstein
Jim Wells
Kevin Wells
Jim Wells
Denise Wells
Jason Wells
Ellie Wheeler
Matt Wheeler
Kristine White
Pam Whiteman
Laura Whiting
Liz Whitmore
David Whitmore
Stephanie Wilson
Maureen Wiseman
Cully Wiseman
Olga Wisem
Phoebe Wood
Jane Wright
Ellen Wyld
Kim Yasui
Jim Yue
Alice zaWitt
Michael zaWitt
Jessica Ziemer