

Music Teacher Ends 12-Year Interlude

Ushwall is retiring.

Music teacher Mel Ashwill, who acquired his Indian nickname meaning "little boy" during his first week at the grade school, is not an "ushwall" at all.

He's a 55 year old man who after almost 25 years of teaching — 12 of those in Warm Springs — is ready to launch into an active early retirement. Mr. Ashwill will be teaching his last music class June 8.

Although he has enjoyed the classroom experience, Ashwill is looking forward to spending his retirement pursuing music theory and composition in more depth. He intends to buy an electric guitar, denying any desire to be a rock star.

To Ashwill rock isn't a style of music. It's the object of his growing hobby — geology. For years the grade school's geologist-in-residence, Ashwill plans to make more room in his life for rocks, especially those that contain fossils.

The quietly ambitious teacher studied science in college, but music was in his blood so he chose to earn a degree in music education at Pacific University. Ashwill comes from a family of "country musicians" with whom he entertained dance crowds in North Dakota while growing up.

At the Warm Springs Grade School Ashwill has felt that the biggest contribution he could make was to give the kids a "good singing experience."

In his gentle, easy-going style the teacher has encouraged students to sing without fear of criticism. "Pitch matching and voice control evolve," he says, when a teacher is accepting and patient.

Singing can be a pleasant way for kids to release tension

and express themselves, says Ashwill.

He has also sprinkled some theory, music history and music from other countries into his classes.

Although he hasn't felt qualified to "teach Indian music," Ashwill has used audiovisual materials assembled by famed Indian composer Louis Ballard. He says the students love the selection of traditional Indian music.

Ashwill remarks on the "strengthened sense of rhythm and sharpened pitch" that Warm Springs students evidence as the result of their early exposure to Indian music and dance.

An overwhelming 75 percent of the grade school enrollment is currently participating in the band program, which Ashwill directs. He has been amazed by the degree of parental support kids receive for their musical efforts. Unlike in other communities where he has taught, parents in Warm Springs give their kids a chance to learn even if they don't evidence talent right away.

It is this patient respect for child's freedom of choice that Ashwill admires and will miss about Warm Springs. He feels he can identify with the Warm Springs community where "the philosophy is more like my own."

He expects to stay close by and in touch. Although he and his wife intend to travel quite a bit, they will remain in their Madras home and not make the mistake of "uprooting themselves" as so many retired folks do.

As Ashwill covers his keyboard and packs up his rocks, young adults will remember when Ushwall received his name, and kindergartners will notice his snowy head beginning to nod to a new tempo.



Retiring music teacher Mel Ashwill surrounds himself with singers from Ms. Squiemphe's first grade class. Ashwill's objective in

the past 12 years has been to give students a "good singing experience." CDS Photo

RANGE USERS URGED TO ORGANIZE FOR DROUGHT

As it becomes apparent that the range will be the resource hardest hit by the drought, concerned individuals on the reservation are rallying to the cry of "Let's get our act together!"

A drought board has just been created and is presenting recommendations for action to the Tribal Council this week. Members of the emergency committee represent all branches of the tribal organization and all resources on the reservation.

The proposed livestock-range board, however, is still in the making. Its success is dependent on the identification of ride bosses for horse and cattle in the various range areas.

At a meeting in Simnasho May 12 Clint Jacks of the Extension Service and Ray Welch of BIA Land Operations illustrated the seriousness of the drought despite recent moisture. Compared to a ten-year average of 4.43 inches of precipitation from January to May, this year's 1.84 inches tell a grim tale. Above average moisture in May is misleading, said Welch, because it hasn't penetrated the soil to any great depth.

Pointing to the damage to range grass and the effects on cattle size and health, Jacks

asked for the advice and input of local people and offered technical assistance to those "natural leaders," the ride bosses.

Simnasho residents will be meeting again to identify their cattle and horse ride bosses for the North End.

Seekseequa is meeting this week and Agency will meet Thursday June 2 at 7 p.m. at the Longhouse to identify their ride bosses.

Jacks explained that livestock owners would profit by organizing for a couple of reasons. First, because of the poor state of the grass at lower elevations, cattle will have to be moved to the high country and kept there while the grass restored itself. This will require the cooperative efforts of many people.

Second, the reservation is more likely to receive available drought relief funding if citizen users form recognizable action groups.

Jacks later stressed the long term benefits of local user input into reservation-wide planning.

Olney Patt, who was selected cattle ride boss from the Mutton Mountain area, commented at the Simnasho meeting, "We're losers when we see our cattle roaming twelve months a year. Let's get on with setting up a user group."

Harold Culpus, at a recent drought board meeting, remarked that range management has been discussed for years and the drought is providing an opportunity to do something about it.

Jacks indicated that many dollars have already been lost. Funds for emergency feed, cattle transportation and drought conservation programs won't last forever, Jacks says.

A proposal to receive a portion of Congress' supplemental appropriations for drought assistance was hastily drawn up last week and its outline of the reservation's livestock, and range needs might produce some necessary funds.

Besides the moving of livestock, other conservation practices such as spring improvements, water hauling, and the construction of wells and catchments are considered desirable by tribal and BIA experts.

Urging the cooperative action of range users, Clint Jacks remarked, "There is money available as long as we have our act together."

But horse ride boss and Tribal Council member Jacob Frank, Sr. warned, "The drought isn't going to wait for us."

Why No Autobiography?

*I can't tell you of the sunshine
and
rainbows
in all my life*

*I can't tell you of the laughter
the tears
the quietness
of all my days*

*I can't explain the rainbow
the mud-holes
the loss
the gain
in all this time*

I can't---

I don't know how

If I did

*I'd write a story so grand
possibly*

*you'd never read
another book.*

Emma Mae Smith