

Council '77

Karen Wallulatum

From Seekseequa School Girl to Council Representative



COUNCILWOMAN KAREN WALLULATUM

(This is the fourth in a series of articles introducing the five newly elected Tribal Council members who took office May 2, 1977. Nearly half of the previous council was replaced by these individuals, some of whom are seasoned public officials and others who are new to government.

During the next four years, events on the Warm Springs Reservation will be shaped in part by these people. True to the climate of improved communication the new council is attempting to create, here is one opportunity for the public to become acquainted with the views of their new representatives.)

Representing the Seekseequa District, newly elected Tribal Council member Karen Wallulatum is facing a new challenge in her customary quiet and unruffled manner.

Born and raised on the Warm Springs Reservation, Karen lived with her family in the Seekseequa area until 1943, when it was time for her to start school.

As with all the other children at that time, she attended the boarding school in the agency area while staying at the "old girls dorm" during the school year.

"I couldn't really say whether I liked it or hated it," she says. "It was quiet and restricted, but it seemed natural in those days. I didn't know anything different."

She recalls, though, that they had to line up in groups to go just about everywhere. "I remember that once a week, on Saturday afternoons, we'd line up with our quarters to go to Macy's to buy pop and ice cream," she says. "I think the older kids got to go on Wednesdays, too. And a quarter would buy a lot then," she reminds.

She lived at the girls dorm for nine years, eight while in grade school and one when she attended high school in Madras.

Now at the age of 41 and serving on the council for the first time, Karen has weighty issues to consider and senses a real responsibility to the whole reservation.

"Though I'm a Seekseequa representative and sit between an Agency and a Simnasho representative in council chambers, when the elven of us get together we're all working for the good of the total reservation," stresses Karen.

At this point, Karen says that she doesn't see any one

thing she could point out as being her biggest concern. There are a number of matters she considers important.

Housing is one of them. "There is a great need for more housing," she states. "I'd like to see people being able to

I would like to see more tribal members in management and supervisory positions.

build and live where they choose, provided they're within the limits of tribal ordinances and requirements.

"Also, I would like to see more of our people in management and supervisory positions within the tribal organization, at Kah-Nee-Ta, and at Warm Springs Forest Products Industries," she asserts.

And, as a mother of nine, the youth of the reservation is an area close to her heart. Says Karen, "Because the children are our future, when talking in terms of the youth, I want the best possible programs available to meet their needs." When it comes to caring for their needs she stresses, "Let's get the best for them."

Though she thinks there are some good individuals working with the young people, the new councilwoman wants assurances that those who are involved with the kids as counselors, policemen, judges, and in social programs care about them and have the needs and interests of all youth at heart.

Karen's interest in youth undoubtedly stems from the fact that she has nine children ranging in age from 7 to 23 - six of whom are still at home.

She observes and interacts not only with her own, but with all their friends, too. "They're all different. They're all individuals and it's pretty interesting," she notes.

Regarding hobbies or personal interests, Karen says she doesn't really do anything for herself. "Being a parent and keeping your children entertained is full-time."

"Because the children are our future, I want the best possible programs available to meet their needs."

As a Seesequa District representative, the councilwoman says there is some talk of people wanting to move back there. "Some have land over there, inherited interests and family ties. I dream of moving back there," she says wistfully.

"Serving on the council makes me realize what an enormous organization we have."

"The problem is that the school and all the employment is centered in the Warm Springs area and it's becoming more and more so." In addition to the fact that there are no TV or telephone lines in the Seekseequa area it makes her wonder if rural development is ever going to happen.

There are nine families living there now, and Karen has a home there though she lives in Miller Heights. All the residences are on wells and springs, and though the domestic water situation is still acceptable, the water levels are less than normal because of the drought, according to Karen.

Though busy with family and Tribal Council business, Karen still maintains her part-time job in the credit department. Because of a possible conflict of interest, however, she no longer serves on the credit committee.

Serving on the Council is an added dimension to Karen's life. "It makes me realize what an enormous organization we do have," she says.

She explains that when she looks at the agenda for the month she knows "pretty much what's going to be coming up." Yet each day is a surprise - "each day is different."

The workload has gotten to the point where, though council is scheduled to meet for just two days a week, they're running more, according to Karen. There is quite a bit of reading involved which she usually does during the day and sometimes in the evening.

She feels that everything that comes to the attention of the Tribal Council is important and deserves adequate discussion and consideration.

And she thinks that more communication with tribal members is needed. Says Karen, "Council has spoken of having more General Council meetings to let people know how and why we're doing these things. I think one answer might be to have more district meetings."