

Tribal member shares youth experience with COCC students

By Leslie Mitts
Spilyay Tymoo

Pizza and slumber parties used to be foreign to Julie Kalama Quaid.

When her family moved from their home in Sandy, Quaid was 12 years old.

She soon found out that she and her siblings were the only Indian students at her school—something that led to a struggle to belong and the acceptance of values and beliefs that Quaid carried throughout her life.

She shared those beliefs with a crowd of students at Central Oregon Community College on Nov. 29.

Quaid shared her personal mantra with the students: "Believe, belong, become."

For Quaid, the process of belonging and believing started early on while living on the reservation.

Growing up, Quaid said, "We had this great sense of belonging."

"To me it was a way of learning how to cope in both worlds," Quaid explained.

But her move to Sandy wasn't without its difficulties.

According to Quaid, "Jumping into that whole other kind of culture, that Americana, was very difficult."

It took time, she said, but she eventually learned about things like pizza and slumber parties.

In Quaid's opinion, "It's almost like living in two whole different worlds."

Quaid also spoke of the difference between societies relating to tribalism versus individualism.

She found the difference as she lived in Sandy during the school year and visited Warm Springs during the summer, she said—something that led to her understanding of both cultures.

However, she said, living as the only Native Americans in their town wasn't always without the exposure to prejudice.

"We would hear things like, 'Well, all you Indians just live off the government,'" Quaid said.

After her high school graduation, she said, she moved to Warm Springs—but knew that she would always pursue higher education.

In high school, she told the crowd, her teachers challenged her to take difficult classes and to succeed.

"Fortunately I had a lot of teachers who really just saw me as a person," Quaid said. "They saw that I had some potential."

While her teachers encouraged her to go to college, Quaid said it was also something that was encouraged by her parents.

Quaid went on to complete a year at Mt. Hood Community College. After that, she returned to Warm Springs and got married at the age of 19, she said.

For two years Quaid worked at the local grocery store, but knew she would eventually return to school—especially after the owners of the store encouraged her to move on.

"You grow up in a bit out in the real world," Quaid said. "You realize you're not going to bag groceries the rest of your life."

After she transferred to Lewis and Clark College and earned her bachelor's degree, Quaid also completed her master's degree.

Her understanding of the need to belong to a community led her to work with those involved with Early Childhood Education.

According to Quaid, "The most important thing to me was to create a sense of belonging for every child that was in our

center."

It was especially important, she said, in order to teach the children that they could be loved.

"To me that's really what it was—to really love these children unconditionally," she said.

Quaid also spoke of a project with adults, where the projects were asked to take a piece of paper and draw their dream.

Some adults were unable to complete the task, she said.

"I think that's just a tough concept for people who feel they've been oppressed for so long," Quaid explained. "They don't believe they have a dream."

Quaid spoke to the crowd about these experiences, and explained that the sense of belonging is what leads to the ability to believe and the ability of a person to become what they want to be.

Quaid also spoke of a recent effort to get Warm Springs community members to vote—a project that led to a turnout of 44 percent of voters.

"It really got the attention of people," she said. "To me it was like the ultimate belonging experience."


Quaid believes that the high amount of voters helped to affect some of the recently political decisions.

As a community, she said, "We can make a change."

Quaid has spoken at COCC twice before: she was a featured speaker during the Oregon Diversity Institute and also a discussion leader during a staff retreat.

Locally Quaid administers the tribal trust fund and the Johnson O'Malley trust fund.

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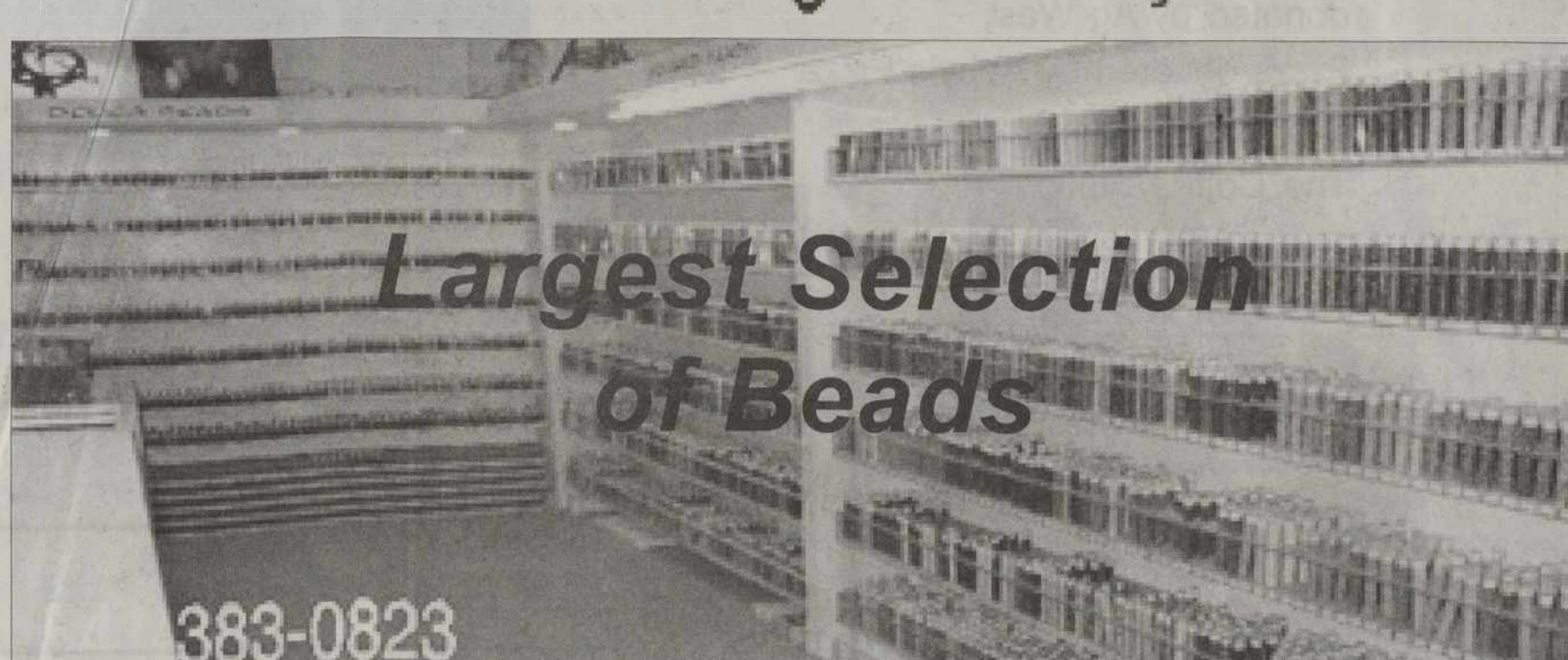
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