

Sanders encourages commitment to education

By Leslie Mitts
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Jeff Sanders is a busy man. Now that he is serving as the president of the Oregon School Board Association, Sanders won't be slowing down anytime soon.

But he's not one to complain about his commitments—especially because he volunteers his time and energy as part of his passion for education.

In addition to working as executive director of the Warm Springs Housing Department, Sanders spends about a month and a half out of each year traveling for his various commitments to education.

His service with the Oregon School Boards Association began about ten years ago when he was approached by the OSBA.

"There's very little representation east of the Cascades," Sanders explained, and so they were looking for someone to represent this area of the state.

As a result, Sanders served in an "at large" position for two years—but then, because the term limit is two years, he finished his responsibility.

After that, friends encouraged him to try for an executive position. The OSBA system of elections allows a candidate to begin as secretary/treasurer and then progress through the ranks of vice president, president elect, president and past president.

Sanders didn't expect to win—instead he ran to satisfy those who urged him to run.

"I thought well, here I am, an Indian from the Warm Springs Reservation and this is a statewide position," Sanders said.

He won the election by a landslide.

Now, several years later, Sanders entered into his term as president of the OSBA for the 2006-07 school year at the annual convention in November.

He will serve as past president for the 2007-08 year.

For Sanders, his service on so many different educational



Jeff Sanders

committees is all part of a bigger picture.

"I believe that the reservation can only survive economically through education," he said. "Education is the cornerstone to everything that our people do."

There is a definite change from older generations as well, Sanders said. In the past, many didn't finish high school and very few pursued higher education.

According to Sanders, "It really narrows the focus of what they can do here for our tribal government."

In fact, Sanders dropped out of high school during his sophomore year because of social and discipline problems.

"I've always looked back on that and said I wish I had finished," Sanders said.

For students today, Sanders hopes to help create more opportunities—something he feels is only available through education.

"I believe that education is the only way that you can go," he said.

It was that very belief that prompted Sanders to begin serving on the local school board 18 years ago.

When he was approached and asked to consider serving on the Jefferson County School Board, Sanders had no intention of making it a long-term commitment.

Instead he originally planned to serve as a representative of the tribe until someone else could fill the position.

But nearly two decades later, Sanders still serves on the Jefferson County School Board.

In addition to his commit-

ments to both the local and state school boards, Sanders has also spent 10 years participating in the national school board association as part of the Pacific Region.

He's served on the legislative and policy committee and even recently returned from Washington D.C. where he met with state representatives in order to address education issues.

For Sanders, the ability to help promote education is important on any level—and he feels that his work on any level is all part of the process.

"The thing that drives me most about it is I see the importance of education," Sanders explained. "Education is the key. It is paramount that we get our young people educated."

Locally, Sanders is part of a much larger group of people and organizations dedicated to education.

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