

Tribal Member Tim Holmes wins Paul G. Hearne Award

Unity, Leadership and Impact

By Chris Mercier

Tim Holmes just can't seem to get enough of Washington, D.C.

Holmes returned to the nation's capitol recently and was awarded the 2nd Annual Paul G. Hearne/AAPD Leadership Award.

"It is a tremendous honor to be selected," Holmes said after returning to Grand Ronde from the invitation only banquet. "I would have never dreamed of it."

The Awards program was established in 1999 in honor of the founder of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), Paul G. Hearne.

Hearne was a tireless advocate and visionary leader who achieved success as a lawyer, non-profit executive, foundation president, federal agency director and mentor to countless people with disabilities.

The program recognizes emerging leaders with disabilities who demonstrate leadership while having a positive impact on the community of people with disabilities.

Holmes earned the award because of his outstanding leadership in advocating for disability rights for persons with disabilities. Holmes is currently the Chair of the Oregon State

Rehabilitation Council, Chair of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority, member and past Chair of the State Independent Living Council, and is currently working with the Tribal Native American Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Holmes and his wife Nancy, who made the trip with him, journeyed to D.C. earlier this year for the 10th Anniversary Rally of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Despite being selected from more than 400 applicants, Holmes maintains a low profile for the whole affair.

"It's good to be acknowledged for the work that I do," he said. "But there are still hundreds of people who do this kind of work who never get recognized."

In that spirit, Holmes plans to keep on keeping on, and will donate a sizable portion of the \$10,000 included with the award to charity, notably the Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living and the American Indian Rehabilitation Rights of Warriors (AIRROW).

The AAPD was founded on July 25, 1995 by a collection of 550 individu-

als from all 50 states. After meeting in D.C., the group created the non-profit organization in order to provide a political and economic voice for the more than 50 million Americans who qualify as disabled. Since its inception, the AAPD membership has ballooned to a robust 49 million members.

The organization stands behind the mantra "unity, leadership and impact" and its foremost objective is, in its own words "to further the productivity, independence, full citizenship and total integration of people with disabilities into all aspects of society and the natural environment."

The AAPD offers assistance to most of its disabled members in the form of life insurance, automobile insurance, banking benefits and other benefits as well as sharing important information regarding disability rights and issues.

The association estimates that 50 million Americans have disabilities, nearly 20 percent of the population. Half of that number consists of people of legal working age, yet only one-third of them actually have jobs, and a clear majority would like to work.

The association contends that more

"Until we can look at someone in a wheelchair and not see the wheelchair, we have a long way to go."

~ Tim Holmes



Photo by Brent Merrill

than \$200 billion is lost annually due to disabled employment, money that members would rather earn as full-fledged segments of the American workforce than as recipients of government hand-outs. By comparison, the annual budget deficit of the United States is approximately \$200 million.

Holmes accepted not on behalf of himself, but on that of the numerous organizations and people who have helped him, particularly the AAPD.

"I've been involved with numerous organizations," he said. "And learned a lot."

Holmes is hopeful that the attention he gets will help draw regional awareness of the AAPD.

"This is not an individual accomplishment," he added.

Couple Gets Another Chance at Life

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out we weren't a match."

When it was confirmed that Bonnie would not be a match, everyone turned to Bob's wife Gayle. They did this knowing that the chances of a husband and wife matching kidneys were rare.

"They asked me if I was healthy," said Gayle. "I wanted to get tested right away. They called us that night to tell us we were the same blood type. We weren't just a match, we were just the closest. It was amazing — I think we amazed them," said Gayle of the doctor's reactions.

"I told the doctor, well after 38 years something should match," said Bob, laughing.

Even in a light moment, Bob knows the deadly seriousness of his condition. He has already suffered from one infection and he knows that in the first two years after the transplant the risk of total failure is extreme.

The couple kept the severity of Bob's condition from most everyone — even their daughter Teri. They said they didn't want to worry her or other family members and loved ones and they would do the same thing again.

"No, if I were going to do it over again, I would do it the same way," explained Bob. "I don't want people to pity me or feel sorry for me or anything. It was something that if we had not had the transplant, we would have survived the best we could right through to the end. But, it worked out great."

When asked what was going through his mind when he saw his grandchildren for the first time after



Photo by Justin Phillips

SEASON TO BE THANKFUL

Tribal member Bob Mercier, a past Tribal Council member and the head of his own trucking company, recently received the gift of life from his wife Gayle. In May of this year, Gayle gave a kidney to her husband of 38 years that saved his life. The surgery was

performed at Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland.

The Mercier's want people to consider becoming donors if and when they are needed.

"You can make it through. It's not as bad as people think," said Gayle.

the operation, Bob started to answer then stopped. The interview became emotional for everyone.

"We had our emotional times for the first couple of months," said Gayle finishing for Bob. "But we feel better now."

"I think it makes you appreciate life a lot more," said Bonnie of everything Bob and Gayle went through. "But, I think usually we get along when we are healthy and you don't think about well maybe this is your last day — or tomorrow. But, when you go through something like this, I think for the whole fam-

ily, it is like a miracle experience and we all look at life differently. We actually take time to do more things together. Our lives are really busy, but we make it a point to do things that we might have put off before."

"Definitely," agreed Gayle.

"You know for me, it just gave me another shot at life," said Bob.

"Yeah," echoed Gayle. "That is the bottom line — another shot at life."

When asked what the holidays will mean for the family this year Bob was strong in his answer.

"A new beginning," said Bob. "That is the best way I can express it."

Ignore the Myths, Build a Support Team

By Brent Merrill

When former Tribal Council member Bob Mercier found out he had kidney failure after 17 years of battling diabetes, he turned to his family for support. He found out that his family had more love for him than he could have imagined — they were willing to make great sacrifices to keep him around.

First, his sister Bonnie stepped up to the plate and offered her kidney. Then Bob's wife Gayle offered hers.

When it was all said and done, the process was not as bad as they thought it was going to be. They survived and they want you to know that you can too.

"So many people have misconceptions about how horrible this thing is that you have to go through and it's really not," said Bob. "We need to let people know that."

"That's what we need to let people know," agreed Gayle.

"The benefits that you reap from it is worth any amount of discomfort you might have had through the surgery part of it," said Bob.

Bob and Gayle Mercier have a message for you if you are finding yourself in a similar situation: "Don't be afraid."

The other need for families in this situation is to build a support team. Find family members and/or friends that you know you can rely on. People that you trust and that you know will be there for you in your times of most need.

"Our support team is what got us through," said Gayle of their daughter Teri, sister Bonnie and her husband Chips Tom and sister Carol Ann and Denny Olson. "You need a support team. We could have never made it without them."