

Grow, Add Staff, Build Character

BY CHRIS MERCIER

After interviewing the Education division's three new employees, the present assumption is that education breeds character. The thought struck me as I finished up a candid talk with Kevin Simmons, who along with Deb Bachman and Joanne Carr form the triad of recent additions to a cluster of people already including notable Grand Ronde personalities like Marion Mercier, April Campbell and Brian Langely.

Truth be told though, none of the three are "new" really, all of them having assumed their respective roles back in the fall. All three have blended in quite nicely with the medley that is Grand Ronde.

Adult Education Coordinator JOANNE CARR

Since commuting seemed to be such a key issue with Bachman, it probably only makes sense to point out that Joanne Carr is a commuter. In fact, her daily Silverton-Grand Ronde drive is of such great length that she often makes trips to the local music store in search of CD's whose length goes beyond one hour. The repetition of the radio is not for her.

Now in Carr you have a woman who does things, really. As the Tribe's new Adult Education Coordinator her contributions, though fresh, are noticeable.

"I've 11 GED graduates," she said, referring to the successful run of the Fall GED class. "11 and counting."

Not bad for having only been at her position for three months. Not bad, but then again, probably not unexpected, given her background. Carr has known a lot in her life, one that began in Ohio back in the 1940's. The rural Midwest being a beacon for German immigrants during the 19th century, Carr traces her lineage along those lines. Her maiden name was Seibert and her father Joe the head of the Marketing department at Miami of Ohio University. Elizabeth Tate, her mother, was of Scottish origins.

After a Hall of Fame athletic career at Talawanda High School in Cincinnati, Carr went on to DePauw University in Indiana, where amid the social turmoil of the late 1960's she would receive her Bachelor's of Arts degree in Philosophy.

Those counterculture days were a fine time to be philosophical, and looking for answers, Carr



Photo by Peta Tinda

decided to see the world. After living in San Francisco, she began a brief career as a stewardess for Pan-Am Airlines; she was afforded the rare opportunity to see such wondrous places like Rome, Beirut and Tehran.

But while briefly settling in Arcata, California did Carr begin to experience her life. While attending Humboldt State University, studying for a Masters in Wildlife Management, she met Vietnam Veteran Rick Carr who would change her life when he became her husband.

The Masters never came, but a unique experience did. After getting married, the couple moved to Quesnel, British Columbia, where they began an earnest existence in a log cabin, teaching to make a living and functioning devoid of such modern amenities like electricity or telephones. For 13 years they lived that way, enjoying most every minute of it and starting a family in the process.

They would decide on Oregon to settle in eventually, especially the small community of Silverton, a place Carr called a perfect balance of conservatism and liberalism. A place of tolerance, really.

Her oldest son Patrick has gone on to the University of Oregon. And Elizabeth has picked Sonoma State. Mike is finishing up high school.

The proximity to Salem allowed Carr to teach, and that she did, offering night classes at Chemeketa Community College for 13 years. In that time she also attended Western Oregon State College, leaving with a Master's degree in Education.

She has found time for other hobbies, like having a horse, a Tennessee Walker by name of Monty. An Australian Shepherd who goes by Abby also makes a good friend and ward against those pesky deer that snack in the orchard. Her 15-acre plot is in a transitional phase right now. Carr eventually hopes to craft her own slice of paradise amongst the blackberry patches and scotchbroom.

The lure of the Tribe, itself in a transitional phase, was one that she could not pass up. Thus the commute doesn't bother her that much.

"It's a treat to have someone call me wanting help for their GED," she said.

Helping students pursue their goals, Carr said, is what she relishes most about the job. Grand Ronde is a classic case of an area where so many opportunities have sprung up when there were very few previously.

"I love helping students with their careers," she said. "I want them to educate themselves and get jobs they actually like, not just ones that pay their bills."

Watching the Education Building go up, she added, has been a particular pleasure. The revival of Chinuk wawa has earned her admiration.

"This is a great job," she said. "I've been inspired by the Education Department and their support. And I love giving away the Pendleton blankets to grads."

College Counselor & Advisor KEVIN SIMMONS



Photo by Peta Tinda

Drifting seems to be a common theme among the Education Division. In fact, after meeting Kevin Simmons, the College Counselor & Advisor, one might hypothesize that it is a requirement, as he too has done a fair share of wandering before drifting and settling, ultimately, in Grand Ronde.

A Tribal member, Simmons shares another commonality with many people in Grand Ronde in that he was born and raised for a significant portion of his childhood in Warm Springs. The son of John Simmons and Tamara Tomlinson, he shared the Redmond household with two brothers and two sisters, before leaving the reservation at a young age to attend Catholic school,

first at St. John's the Apostle in Oregon City and then La Salle in Milwaukie.

"Catholic school was such a shock from Warm Springs," Simmons told me, adding that while he resented the venture at first, hindsight has indicated just how valuable an investment it was. "I was a cliché really — the silent Indian kid sitting in the back row."

Silent or not, his academic and gridiron skills earned him a trip to Shasta College, where he played football, briefly, before transferring to Willamette University. While not exactly a mistake, he said, the conservative demeanor of Willamette and Salem didn't suit him well.

"I just felt alienated," he said. "I was alone there."

And that is why he decided to return to northern California, opting for Arcata and Humboldt State University. Playing football as an offensive tackle and majoring in Native American Studies, for the first time since Warm Springs, Simmons felt "at home."

"Humboldt changed my perception of Indians," he said. "It was pretty negative, with alcoholism and unemployment and drugs."

Indeed, the abundance of Natives and of Hawaiians with whom he forged lifelong bonds had a greater influence on him than any other people, besides his mother of course ("I can't say enough about my mother").

"I learned that education is an ongoing process," he told me. "You learn what you can from

everyone, whether they're black, white, brown, green, purple, whatever."

In many ways then, his position at the Education division, which he took over in July, serves as an opportunity to do for Tribal youth what was done for him back in Arcata — offer support, explore options and above all impress upon Tribal youth the importance of education and self-improvement.

"This is really one of the best jobs around," he explained. "In order for the Tribe to be self-sufficient, we need more Tribal members to go to college and get degrees."

Though only 25 years of age, Simmons himself hasn't given up on education. He is presently studying for the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) in hopes of making law school somewhere. Plans have slowed somewhat with the birth of his daughter Kaelynn, whom he endowed with the middle name of Noelani, Hawaiian for "beautiful girl from heaven."

Simmons and fiancée Robin Hawke have plans to marry in May. Until then their hobbies include each other, Kaelynn and adjusting to Willamina, where they presently live.

"This town is a culture shock from Arcata," he said, alluding to the California city, a "hippie" (as he likes to call them) haven not unlike Eugene.

What little free time he does find often is spent reading about indigenous people and cultures around the world. Sherman Alexie and Vine Deloria are among his favorites. ■