

## She Survived And Now She Lives To Tell The Story And Raise Her Children

By Peta Tinda

Speaking to a crowd of over 600 at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Indian Child Welfare Conference, Tribal member Andrea Verduzco told her story of growing up in the tough neighborhoods around Portland, but then added how much her life has changed since getting back to her Native roots.

She grew up in Hillsboro, Oregon, a suburb of Portland. "Hillsburrito," is what they call it, she said, because of the large Hispanic community centered there.

"I always followed the Hispanic side and not my Native side," she said. "I enjoy hearing about the culture, and I feel like its expected of me to learn as much as I can."

She has two children; Ezra Lorenzo Pacheco, age 2, and Izika Pashence Rayn Pacheco, age 11 months. She is

engaged to Roy Pacheco, and is to be married in July of 2004. She is currently employed as a telephone receptionist at the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's Public Information Office. Although somewhat apprehensive at first, she was relieved by the warm welcome she received from Tribal members. Verduzco, age 20, is looking forward to meeting relatives she never knew she had and raising her children in the community.

During her teenage years, she was always running away from home, and was in and out of correctional institutions.

When she got pregnant, she knew then she had to straighten out.

After doing time at several youth correctional facilities, she got involved with the Tribal Youth Work Experi-

ence Program, which is under the Tribal Youth Social Services Prevention Program

Three months ago social worker Christina Peuntes asked her to speak at the National Indian Child Welfare Conference, to which she agreed readily.

As a result of her experiences as an adolescent she feels like she's a better person.

"I've been able to put my priorities at the top and not at the bottom," she said.

I have plenty of experience on how not to raise kids...In my opinion I'm a good mom, I always try to do my best, but there's always room for improvement," said Verduzco.

"I feel like this is a good community to raise kids."



Photos by Peta Tinda

Tribal member Andrea Verduzco was a speaker on a youth panel at the 21st Annual National Indian Child Welfare Conference, held in Portland on April 15.

She plans to have her children attend the Tribal pre-school when they're old enough and eventually wants them to dance in pow-wows.

She plans to be more involved in the community as well, starting with attending membership meetings.

"I definitely feel welcomed," she said. "Everyone has been so nice. I love the people in my department; I love the Smoke Signals guys upstairs; I love everybody."

"Maybe one day I'll be on Tribal Council," she said with a smile.



Representatives from the Tribal Youth Social Services Departments attended the N.I.C.W.A. Conference.

## Lisa Leno's Got A New Gig With The Social Services Department



Lisa Leno

By Peta Tinda

"The whole idea is to have a lot of community activities," said Lisa Leno, talking about her new position as Tribal Youth Prevention Coordinator. Together with David Fullerton, Tribal Social Services Director, Leno has been organizing a series of concerts, perfor-

mances, wellness days and an upcoming youth basketball tournament.

The events have been funded by several state and federal grants aimed at preventing high-risk behavior in teens by giving them activities to get involved in.

All of the events are drug and alcohol free with an emphasis towards providing positive role models for Native youth.

One of the first events was a concert by Native rapper Litefoot, which drew a crowd of 300 to a drug and alcohol free night packed with Native pride and a strong social message. And according to Fullerton, it was a successful formula, which will be repeated.

"We're trying to get high caliber Indian role models," said Fullerton. "It's like your one opportunity to help youth prior to them having contact with law enforcement and courts. It's putting your money into services before problems can occur."

In the coming months, Leno and

Fullerton will be working on organization, doing surveys and planning activities and events. They have been working to identify where services are most needed. Close cooperation with the Tribal Culture and Youth Education Departments is planned.

"Right now we're in the planning and development stage," said Leno. "We want to educate the community that the program exists and then get them involved."

All of the Social Services events are free and open to the public and community.

In March, they hosted The Fabulous Harlem Crowns, a professional traveling basketball team, to do a drug and alcohol clinic at the gym followed by a basketball game with members of the community.

For April, the Social Services program put on a boys and girls Wellness Training Day, with Native movie star Elaine Miles as a special guest.

Most recently they collaborated with

the Tribal Cultural Department to host the highly successful Agency Creek Round Dance.

In June, they are planning on hosting a Tribal culture and prevention camp for middle school and high school teens.

The overall goal, Leno said, is to develop a comprehensive youth prevention program that address not only the short term solutions but also the long term, community oriented goals.

"When we begin to see a reduction in youth participating in high-risk behavior and an improvement in high school performance, that's when we'll know we've succeeded," said Leno.

"If you look at it, it's simple," said Fullerton. "We want to provide positive Indian role models they can connect with."

"We have a lot of young people who are really trying to do the right thing," said Leno. "We want to give them the opportunity to do so."

## From Japan To The Reservation — Michelle Starostka Is The New Career Advisor

By Peta Tinda

The Tribal Education Program has a new College and Career Advisor. Michele J. Starostka will help students further their educational careers by helping them with the sometimes-difficult world of college entry. Starostka just graduated from Oregon State University with her Master's Degree in Education. She also has her Bachelor's Degree in International Affairs and Economics.

"She's very qualified," said Tribal Education Director Marion Mercier. "We're very fortunate to have her."

Starostka's responsibilities will include advising students on what their next educational step will be, referring them to different schools and universities, taking them on campus tours, and helping them with their resumes.



Michele J. Starostka

Since she likes helping people, said Starostka, this job is exactly what she had hoped she would be doing.

"I try to make a connection with my students," said Starostka. "My door is always open."

The Dallas, Oregon, native did some traveling before coming to work in Grand Ronde.

She lived in Yoshioka, Japan for three years after college and she speaks Japanese fluently. She is a newlywed and recently moved to Pacific City where she lives with her husband.

Though she's only been with Education for a couple of months, Starostka has been very active. She was essential to making the Annual Career Fair in Grand Ronde bigger and better this year. It was held in the new gym at the Tribal education building on April 3. She lined up dozens of sponsors and

college representatives for the event.

One of the main components of her job, Starostka said, is helping students track down funding for their educations.

"A lot of students might not realize all of the grants and scholarships available out there," she said. "We do our best to get the word out about any funding. We're an excellent resource to put students on the right track."

Many of the students that come to see her are changing careers, going to college for the first time, or going back to school while juggling work and children.

"Any major changes in a person's life, like going to school; can be very stressful," she said. "We try hard to make the experience have the least amount of stress possible."