

Chinuk Language Gaining Equality At The University Level

■ Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Don Day maybe first ever to graduate with a Native language credit.

By Peta Tinda

Don Day arrived at the Tribal Governance Center with a sealed envelope from the University of Oregon in his coat pocket.

In it was the proof that he had recently completed the 180 credits required for a Bachelors' Degree in Anthropology, something Day thought he'd never have.

Day is Tribal Elder and Vietnam Combat Veteran.

He is recognized for his knowledge of ancient technologies, such as flint knapping and cedar plank splitting, (See *Smoke Signals*, 12/15/2002 issue) as well as his commitment to Native archeology.

"This is something I never believed would happen in my lifetime," he said.

Day wants to use his degree to help Native people learn more about their ancestors and traditions.

"At one time our people lived throughout the Willamette Valley, from where we are sitting to the Cascade Range," said Day.

"Our history and heritage is buried here in the valley and my main goal is to help the Grand Ronde Tribe — or any Tribe — to get it back."

Now that he's completed the bachelor's degree program, Day is already enrolled in the master's program, which will require another 45 credits to accomplish. He wants to get an interdisciplinary degree in Anthropology, Archeology, Linguistics and Geology.

"I started on that trail, hopefully I won't fall off," he said with grin.

One of the unique things about Day's degree is that instead of taking French

ment," said Tribal Language Specialist Tony Johnson, who teaches the three credit class.

"Hopefully he's the first of many."

Johnson sees Day using Chinuk for his degree as another milestone in legitimizing the language, which is sometimes known as Chinuk Jargon.

"It's a big step for us in getting the equality of our language," said Johnson.

Day has close ties with the Tribal Culture Resources Department, having first worked as a part-time site monitor for the department before attending the University of Oregon. He is also on the Cultural Resources Committee for the Tribe.

As he began his studies, he realized that the textbooks he was learning from were not always accurate when it came to Native history.

"I got tired of reading someone's hypothesis on what happened. The history has been so badly misinterpreted, and we don't have all that many Native textbook writers," he said. "There is no written history, but the history is there in the stones."

Because of his background in prehistoric tools and ancient technology, Day

often recognizes artifacts that other archeologists at a dig site might overlook.

"I catch stones that are discarded because I'm a flint knapper. I've found small stone tools that were used by children—you won't find that in a textbook," he said.

Though the Tribe paid his tuition and helped him with scholarships, Day had ups and down, like any student. The evidence was all contained in the envelope that recorded his grade point average for his time at university.

"It hasn't come easy for me" said Day. "There's nothing more discouraging than thinking you did real good on a test and then finding out you failed. But you change something— maybe you're attitude and you just dig in and keep going."

"We had to figure out where every dollar went — that's the life of a student, always broke. But it's all worth it because of what's at the end. With a degree I can go work anywhere in the field of anthropology. And with a master's degree I can teach."

Day said that he wanted to thank the Tribal Council and the Tribal Education Department for helping him with his endeavor.

In the meantime, Day plans on continuing his research into the past.

"I would like nothing better than to map different archeological sites in the Willamette Valley," he said.

"It's our history and it needs to be documented somehow." ■



Photo by Peta Tinda

Don Day

or German classes to fulfill the language requirement; Day completed a Chinuk WaWa class, quite possibly the first time that any college student anywhere has done so.

"He's the first person to get a university degree using the Chinuk WaWa as the foreign language require-

Traditional Naming Ceremony To Be Held In Grand Ronde

Ceremony continued from front page

is welcome to come and eat with us and then we'll have a little birthday party after the meal for Warm Springs Chief Nelson Wallulatam and Warm Springs Medicine Man Larry Dick."

Holmes said the next step will be to take some time and set up the Name-Giving ceremony and the giveaways that are such an important part of this traditional event.

After the ceremony there will be another break so the medicine men and the medicine singers can get something to eat before the Medicine Dance begins.

Holmes said he asked Dick to bring medicine sticks so the Grand Ronde people can use them to help keep time for the medicine singers.

"This is something that the missionaries and the priests didn't bring in," said Holmes of the traditional Name-Giving ceremony. "Our people have always been medicine singers and medicine dancers."

Holmes explained that part of the tradition of medicine singers is healing.

"They will dance first over some-

one that might be ill and if they see that they are doing some good, then they will continue," said Holmes. "They believe in their powers and that

people to work on them and they will.

Holmes said the traditions of this ceremony are longstanding.

"It has been with our people as long

always called his son Jim "Rabbit."

"He (Jim) has been Rabbit since he could talk and I still call him Rabbit," said Holmes. "So, I was talking to Larry (Warm Springs Medicine Man Larry Dick) about it and he said 'you ought to give him that name in Indian.'"

Holmes explained that he researched the name and got two pronunciations in the Sahaptin Language and the Wasco Language. Holmes said Chief Nelson wants to give Jim both names.

"It will be with him (Jim) all the time," said Holmes.

Initially the ceremony was not going to be such a big event, but Holmes said the medicine people were excited about the opportunity to bring a traditional ceremony to the people of Grand Ronde and asked to come to be a part of it.

"The medicine people said 'we will come down there and help you put it on, because you are one of us,'" said Holmes.

"I think it is really important because this is the old way of doing it," said Holmes of the Name-Giving ceremony. Holmes has been gathering giveaway items for months now as preparation for the sacred event because the giveaway is integral to the traditional process. "We went back to the ancient tongue to get the double pronunciation of the word "Rabbit."

"This is the way it has been done on the reservations for all time. They (our ancestors) had traditional foods and they gave away a lot of things that were valuable to them — that was part of the ceremony. So, we'll do the same here."



Photo by Brent Merrill



Photo courtesy of Merle Holmes

Brothers — The family of Tribal Elder Merle Holmes (left, seated) will host the first traditional Name-Giving ceremony to be held in generations in Grand Ronde. Warm Springs Medicine Men Wilbur Johnson (left) and Larry Dick (right) will perform the ceremony, naming Holmes' son, James (above right, with brother David). All are welcome to attend the Saturday, February 28 ceremony, which begins at noon at the Community Center in Grand Ronde.

they help. They get right in and they work over these people and it helps them. It's a good thing."

As a practical man, Holmes said he has witnessed the power of the medicine dance on others and even himself. Holmes has practiced the traditions for the last 10 to 12 years. Holmes said that if someone from the Grand Ronde community feels distressed over a mental or physical ailment they can ask the medicine

as we have been here and they practiced it," said Holmes.

Holmes is descendant of Chief Joseph Shangretta who was a well-known medicine man in Grand Ronde before the turn of the century.

Holmes explained that Shangretta brought comfort to people with his knowledge of their conditions and that he worked hard at knowing his craft.

When asked what the reasons for the ceremony were Holmes said he has