

A Healing Voice In Indian Country

■ Nakima Kerchee runs a newspaper with good things in mind.

By Ron Karten

Nakima Kerchee (Lakota, Ogallala Sioux) is a woman of great contradictions.

Her children are literally the seventh generation of her family to serve in the military. They have seen military life from both sides now. She went to Desert Storm to make America safer and came back with cancer. She served as a platoon sergeant but treated her troops as a mother would treat her children.

"There were 72 men in my platoon," she said. "I became their mother and they became my sons. I was as protective as a mother would be and they were as protective of me as sons would be. We still meet on the internet each week."

With a son and a daughter both in the military behind her, she says that she is "very firmly for the Veterans (but) I'm doing many things to make sure that they don't get the same thing that my father got when he got home and what I got when I came home. I'm talking about the way the public treated us. My father was in the Korean (war) and when he got back, they said it wasn't a war. He received a Korea War Service medal 50 years after the war ended. I served in Grenada, Desert Shield and Desert Storm and when I returned, nobody noticed. I went to Redmond airport and my parents weren't even there. Nobody had notified them that I was coming in. That's what's happening with National Guardsmen today."

And on the other hand, Kerchee also said, "I could've killed my daughter for joining. I don't believe in it. The vow I took said we are to defend our country against enemies foreign and domestic. It doesn't say anything about invading a foreign country."

War in all its complexity makes a pretty good case for her taking either side. Well read and worldly wise, Kerchee has both the history of war and the experience of war under her belt, but the underlying messages are not always clear.

Five in her platoon "came up with cancer within six months of return-

the healthiest sick person I've seen in a long time."

In fact, it was the cancer, said Kerchee, that inspired her to start *Medicine Winds News*, a monthly newspaper that she both edits and publishes. And like everything she does, this paper — is about healing.

"Our number one goal," she said, "is to lift up the voices from the different Tribal newspapers on a national level in a positive form. If you want to know the positive things happening in Native America, pick up a free copy of *Medicine Winds News*."

The "News" has 15 board members, five representing Tribes across the Northwest and the rest from Tribes across the nation. "We have a youth rep on the board, three Veteran reps and four Elders. We have women and men. Our goal was to encompass every group represented in North America," said Kerchee.

At the same time that Kerchee is bringing a vast, sprawling history to a contemporary audience, she also is putting out a very personal, very local publication that allows her to wear her heart on her sleeve and to take the kind of interest in her subjects that few publications are allowed.

"The very first publication that we ever did," she said, "was in Lawton, Oklahoma. We did a story on my

husband's family. They are very prominent within the Comanche Nation. We focused on his uncle, Melvin Kerchee, Jr. and his great grandfather, Private First Class Eli Hovaritchka. I did the photos. It was the first time I ever did photos for a paper; and Uncle Melvin looked African American rather than Native because I didn't know how to lighten the pictures. We only published 300 papers. I took the boxes (of newspapers) over to Uncle Melvin who was a newlywed at the time. I told him I wouldn't publish it if he didn't want me to. 'Darnit,' he said. 'I knew I shouldn't have visited that tanning salon!'

"(I was) so concerned. I expected him to be extremely angry. He played it until the hilt. He kept a straight face until the end. And then, he helped me distribute the papers."

"It is very cool to have the family support your efforts."

Kerchee explained her campaign against dogs on pow-wow grounds: "Pow-wow dancing is when I talk to my creator," she said. "A lot of things come to me while I'm dancing. I receive the blessings that I have, big and small, because the glory of what I do doesn't come from me and doesn't come to me. It goes to the Creator. The Creator inspires what is in the paper."

"I write on the basis that it was put into my heart by the Creator. And the most important thing of all, no matter what I write, it is always written with love. I'm not out here to hurt anybody."

About 12,000 readers get their hands on a copy of *Medicine Winds News* each month, said Kerchee. They are available at pow-wows as well as through vendors and advertisers. For more information, contact Kerchee at medicinewindsnews@yahoo.com.



Photo by Peta Tinda

Family News — Nakima Kerchee stopped by *Smoke Signals*' offices last week to drop off copies of *Medicine Winds News*. Pictured with Kerchee are her son and daughter.

ing from Saudi Arabia," she said. "Three are now gone. And none of us had the same kind of cancer: one was leukemia, two were bone cancer, one was breast cancer, and one was prostate cancer."

When Kerchee was "medically retired" in January, 2000, doctors gave her three months to live. She just stayed in bed until her daughter came around and told her: 'You need to get your ass out of that bed.'

She got up to attend pow-wow, she said, "so now, pow-wow is very special to me. Every time I've gotten cancer, I have pow-wow-ed my butt off. The doctor told me, 'I wish all my patients could go to pow-wows because you're

Samples Of Game Animals Sought

■ Natural Resources Division is helping study deer and elk populations to track the spread of disease.

By Ron Karten

Tribal hunters have always been among the best, not only in bringing game animals down, but also in the concern they show for the health of wildlife in general and their habitats. So, when a bunch of game animal diseases began to spring up across the country, Native Americans were a natural place to look for help.

Today, the state has three important diseases under consideration. In cooperation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the United States Department of Agriculture Veterinary Services (USDA), TNR staffers are asking local hunters to bring in fresh samples of Oregon deer and elk.

"We offered to take samples just because we're interested in our local populations," said Brandy Duff, Biological Technician for the Tribe's Natural Resources Division (TNR).

The Tribe is part of this on-going program for the third year now.

Here, according to a handout from TNR, is a rundown of what we know and what federal, state and Tribal authorities are studying:

■ **Deer Hair Loss Syndrome** is already present in the Grand Ronde area, but its cause is unknown.

■ **Chronic Wasting Disease**, if it shows up in Oregon, can have devastating effects on deer and elk populations.

■ **Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease** is not known to be present in the Grand Ronde area but has been detected in southwest and central Oregon.

"The first year, we took the heads to ODFW," said Duff. "They took the samples. Sometimes, with such a delay, they couldn't always get a useable sample. Last year, they came out and trained us to take the samples."

Now, TNR Fish/Wildlife Coordinator Kelly Doerksen, Biologist Jeff Baker and Duff are taking the samples.

To encourage hunters to bring in



Photo by Willie Mercier

Deer Hair Loss — The deer pictured is from Grand Ronde and shows the Deer Hair Loss Syndrome.

samples, TNR is planning a drawing for a \$450 first prize gift certificate to Sportsman's Warehouse and a second prize \$50 gift certificate, also to Sportsman's Warehouse. The drawing will be held 5:30 p.m. on April 12, 2005, and the winners will be notified.

Last year, Carl Lambert won the \$450 prize and Rhonda Leno won the \$50 prize. The Fish and Wildlife Committee put up the money for the prizes last year and this year, said Duff.

Meanwhile, in order to test for these diseases, TNR is seeking some specific samples, as follows:

- Elk brain stem and lymph nodes
- Deer brain stem and lymph nodes
- Deer blood sample
- Deer lice sample

Useable samples collected from fresh (within 24 hours of death) deer/elk road kills will also earn entries for the person who reports them to the Tribes' biologists.

Bring the hunter-harvested animals to the TNR office at 47010 SW Hebo Road, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. After hours or on the weekends, call 503-434-3604. Each deer will have three useable samples and each elk will have one. Every useable sample will be considered a new entry.

None of the diseases is known to affect humans, said Rick Boatner, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist, for North Willamette Watershed District. He is running the study for the district that stretches from Dallas to the Columbia River, both east and west of the Cascade and Coast ranges. ■