

Willamina High School Holds Its 92nd Graduation

By Toby McClary

The rain clouds separated and allowed the sun to shine on the 55 graduating seniors of Willamina High School.

On Saturday, May 28, Willamina held its 92nd graduation. The commencement took place at Glen Larkins Field and packed the stadium with family and friends.

Julia Wasson welcomed everyone with a piano processional and Brenda Wasson opened the ceremony by singing the National Anthem.

After some opening statements, Superintendent Gus Forster introduced keynote speaker Mark Havel. On October 14, 2004, Havel lost his son Ross in a tragic plane crash in Grand Ronde. Ross, Kristi Ward of McMinnville and Tribal member Travis Hofenbrell died in the crash. Ross would have been a member of the Graduating Class of 2005. An empty chair, representing Ross' absence, was placed beside his father's chair and many of the students wore a message on their mortar boards that read: "We Love You Ross."

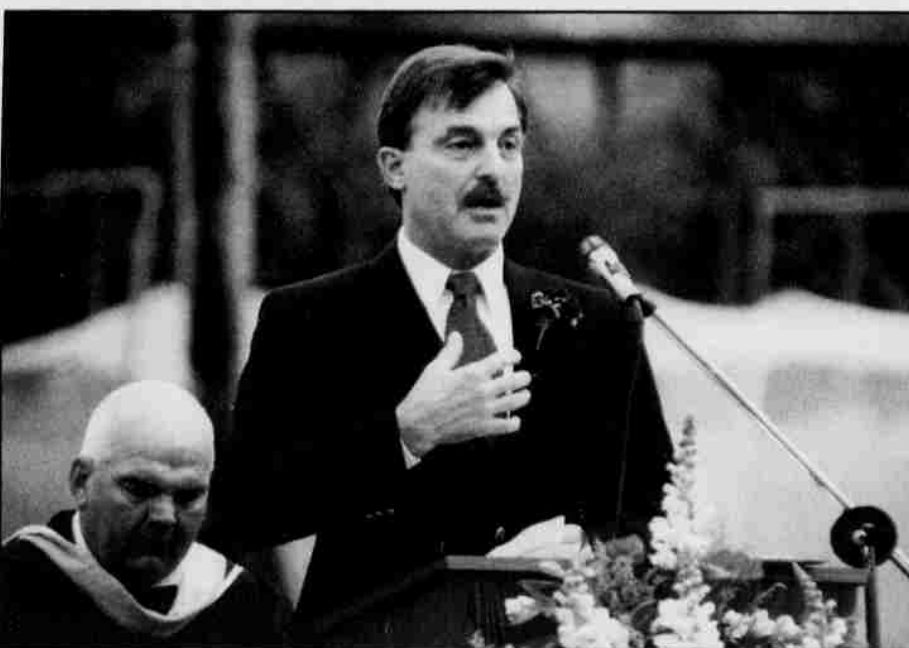
Havel opened his speech by telling the students to have some desire in their lives.

"Give a hoot," said Havel. "Nothing happens if you don't."

He encouraged the graduates to



Tribal Member Kyle Kearl



"Give A Hoot" — Keynote speaker Mark Havel addressed the students with a light-hearted and comical speech about debt, watching too much television and taking care of their bodies. Havel lost his son, Ross, in a tragic plane crash in October of 2004. He did not speak of his son at the commencement, but the memories of Ross were in the minds of all in attendance. Havel ended his speech by singing "The Galaxy Song" by Monty Python.

*"Learn as if you were to live forever.
Live as if you were to die tomorrow."*

~ Willamina's Class of 2005



Tomorrow Starts Today — Tribal member and Valedictorian Amanda Thomas (far right) walks with fellow classmates (l to r) Angie Harper, Carissa Burdon and Ashley McDaniel as Willamina holds its 92nd graduation. The commencement took place on Saturday, May 28 at Glen Larkins Field. Thomas, along with Tribal member Ashlee Merrill, were the only two Native American students in Oregon to be honored with the Gates Millennium Scholarship.

do things that they want to do and not to reduce themselves to just the things that they have to do.

Havel covered many subjects in his speech including debt, watching too much television and warned students to take care of their bodies.

"Your body is the only real vehicle you'll ever have," said Havel. "So keep your vehicle up."

Finally, Havel ended his presentation by singing "The Galaxy Song" by Monty Python which resulted in a long, loud applause from the crowd.

The ceremony then focused on awards and scholarships and some short speeches from the Valedictorians.

Tribal members Amanda Thomas and Ashlee Merrill were recognized as two of only 1,000 students nationwide to win the Gates Millennium scholarships. Thomas, along with Jamie Givens, Brian Fendall and Thomas Esplin, was honored with valedictorian.

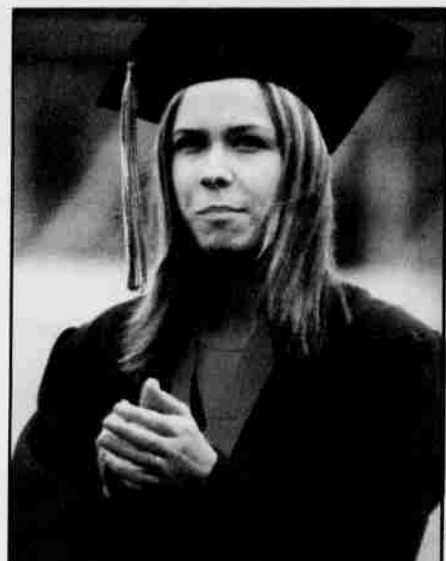
Thomas thanked her parents and classmates and wished her grandmother a Happy Birthday in her speech.

Merrill was also awarded with a scholarship from both Kiwanis and Harold & Helen Smith.

Caitlyn Chewning, Nicole Risseuw and Carissa Burdon were all honored with salutatorian.

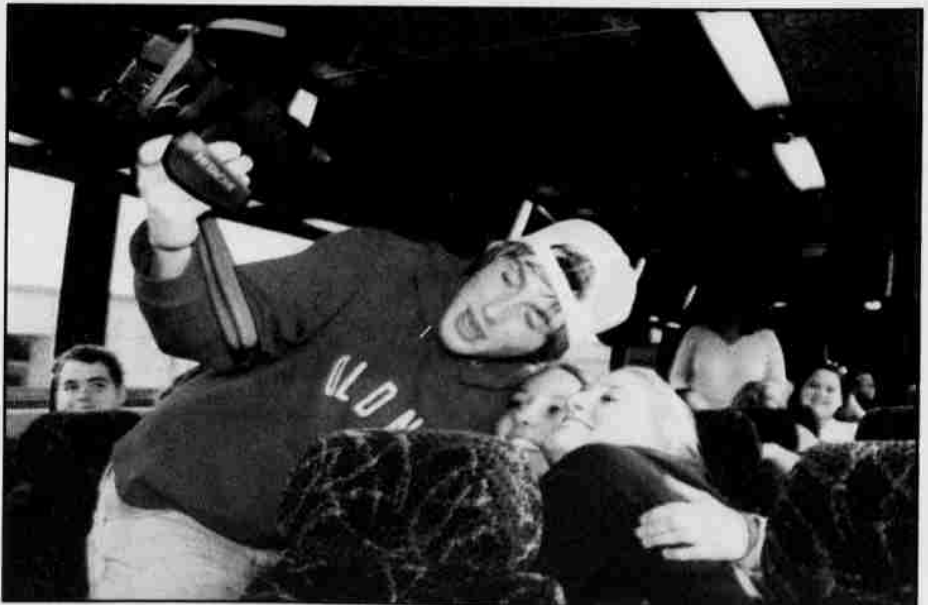
After the speeches, awards and diplomas were handed out, the students were greeted in the middle of the field by their parents, siblings and friends.

Many students attended family



Tera Thayer

gatherings after the ceremony and before the senior trip which was held at Six Flags and Marine World in Vallejo, California.



Togetherness — Graduates Chelsea Crouch (far right) and Jamie Givens mug for Stephen Price's camera just before leaving Willamina for Six Flags Resort outside of San Francisco on Saturday, May 29.



Thrill Zone — Willamina seniors spent the day after graduation at Six Flags Resort in California. The students and their parents raised money throughout the year for the trip, food, expenses and the bus. Students enjoyed good food, animal exhibits and thrilling rides like the world-famous "Medusa."



Tribal Members Receive Gates Millennium Scholarships

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with an opportunity to gain an education at an undergraduate or graduate level — it covers 100 percent of the students' unmet needs and is renewable for up to nine years.

Merrill and Thomas were the only two recipients in the Native American category to receive this scholarship in the state of Oregon, and they were among only five recipients in the entire Pacific Northwest.

"I'm very proud that two of our youth out of five Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest were chosen," said Valerie Sheker-Robertson, Tribal Council Member. "It's a very hard thing to get these scholarships."

Thomas plans to attend OSU for two years to work on her general education requirements before transferring to OHSU, where she plans to complete a nursing science degree.

She originally had thoughts of becoming a doctor. When she learned that the job of a nurse practitioner would be close to that of a doctor, but with a fraction of the stress load she knew that's what she wanted to do.

"I'm really glad I got the scholarship," said Thomas. "It's going to help me out tremendously through college."

Merrill gained early acceptance attend OSU in the fall where she will begin working toward a doctorate in physical therapy. She plans to transfer to a school that specializes in physical therapy after her sophomore year.

"I'm just really excited to get this chance," said Merrill. "I

know I would never have been able to pay for school without this opportunity."

Merrill said she has a fascination for health care, but she didn't like the idea of working with needles and blood. She likes the idea of helping people recover from accidents and injuries.

"Anatomy was big for me," she said. "I love learning how the body works and how the muscles work."

Both Thomas and Merrill had to complete an extensive application process for the Gates Millennium Scholarship. Before applying, each of the girls had to be nominated by someone who was familiar with their academic achievements. They also needed a recommendation from someone who was familiar with their community service and leadership activities.



Tribal Member Ashlee Merrill

Once the girls made it past this stage, they were required to write eight essays, submit activity sheets and list all classes taken throughout high school.

"It was a big thing," said Thomas.

"It probably took me about a month to finish it."

Rachel Warner, Cooperative Education/Internships Advisor at OSU, played a big role in the application process for both girls. At the time, Warner was the College Counseling & Career Advisor for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

Warner nominated both Tribal members for the scholarships.

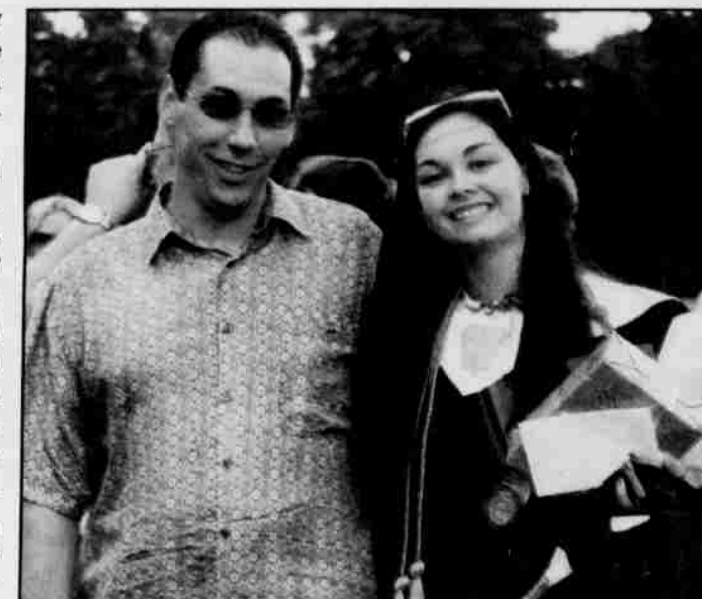
Warner wrote about their leadership skills, background barriers and the challenges she had seen them overcome as students.

"They are great students; they're very involved in leadership activities and they have a great GPA," said Warner. "It was easy to write about them."

For Tribal Council, education is considered one of the most important programs offered to the membership.

"As Tribal Council people our position is that we want to see as many people go to college as possible," said Sheker-Robertson. "And we want to see them succeed."

"If it were up to me every Tribal member coming out of high school would be going on to college," said Chris Mercier, Tribal Council Member. "We have a lot of Tribal members going to college, but not as many as I'd like to see."



College Bound — Tribal member Amanda Thomas, Gates Millennium Scholarship winner and Willamina High School Valedictorian, poses for a picture with her father, Tribal member Brian Thomas.

Thomas and Merrill are not only excellent students, but they are both actively involved with the Grand Ronde community.

Thomas is an intern for the Grand Ronde HeadStart program. She is responsible for teaching math and science projects to the children. Thomas began working with the HeadStart program last June, and is expected to continue working through the summer until school begins in the fall.

Merrill has just been accepted into an internship program with Spirit Mountain Casino. She will be learning about college life and ethics in the workplace. She was very excited about the opportunity to learn about business she said, she wants to start her own physical therapy practice someday.

"I think it will work really well for me," said Merrill. "It will help a lot when I want to start my own company."