

Success Story: Disabled Gain Benefits Angel

■ Julie Singer brings expertise with services to Tribe.

By Toby McClary

Disability Consultant Julie Singer has been working with the disabled for over 25 years.

Singer is an independent contractor through the Social Services Department. Her focus is to assist Tribal members and their families when applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Disability.

"I try to help Tribal members," said Singer. "I try to help in many areas, but mainly Disability. That's where my expertise is."

In 2002, Singer retired from the state after a 35 year career. In her final 10 years with the state, she worked as the disability liaison for the Adult and Family Services Department.

While working for Adult and Family Services, she did consulting with some of Pam Bernard's clients who were Grand Ronde Tribal members. Pam Bernard also works for Adult and Fam-

ily Services and is stationed in Grand Ronde.

Singer then met Social Services Manager Dave Fullerton who asked her if she would like to contract her services for the Tribe.

"Tribal Council determined that we needed support for SSI clients," said Fullerton. "We found Julie and she agreed to contract with us to provide these services. She helps package people's applications and gives our clients more success."

Since April of 2004, Singer has been helping Tribal families across Oregon.

"They're great to work for and they have accepted me," said Singer.

Singer works with the Vocational Rehabilitation Department, doctors and the Social Services Department to help determine the severity of one's disability. She explained that being denied helpful services, when applying for the first time, is not a rare occurrence.

"Applying for disability or SSI is

not an easy or a fast process by any means," said Singer. "My job is to contact people in the field that others might not know about."

Singer explained that there are a lot of unnecessary funds being spent in hopes to acquire disability services.

"Tribal members are spending a lot of money on attorneys," said Singer. "Many times we can go through the whole process without ever needing to speak to an attorney."

Singer's main focus is getting Tribal members what they need and deserve. She spoke on the amount of respect she has for Native Americans.

"I grew up with Native Americans," she said. "I've always had a lot of respect for them and that's why this has been such a great opportunity for me."

She is also working on becoming an accredited agent for Vet-



Photo by Toby McClary

Julie Singer

erans' Affairs.

"I would like to work with the Veterans and get them the benefits that they are entitled to as well," she said.

Singer has had a positive impact on getting Tribal members disability services and her success rate is noticeable.

"Before Julie, I had seen hundreds of people denied," said Fullerton. "Now we get about 80 percent of the applicants approved. She's been a benefit to our program as well as Tribal members. There is no way we could match the expertise that she has brought to us."

Building The Framework Of A New Life

■ Tribal member Greg Norwest works with Joe Kirk and Brett Anderson to construct a career.

By Toby McClary

Greg Norwest asked us to dedicate this story to his grandfather, the late Tribal Elder Leo Norwest. His mom, Tribal Elder Vernita Harris, often says that he takes after his grandfather.

~ Editor

As Tribal member Greg Norwest remodels and stabilizes the building at 2204 N.E. Alberta Street in Portland, he is also remodeling and stabilizing the building blocks of his life.

Norwest, who earlier in life lost sight of his goals and ambitions, is now on the right track. He has been working with the Social Services Department since 2002 and has maintained sobriety since then as well.

"It's time to grow up," said Norwest. "My main focus now is staying clean and sober."

When Norwest was 16, he joined the Job Corps and was interested in welding and concrete masonry. After the corps, Norwest picked up a few side jobs until meeting Architect Brett Anderson in 1994. Anderson hired Norwest on to the framing crew where he worked steadily for about a year.

"Brett said he would hire me and give me some on-the-job training," said Norwest.

When I hired him, I could tell that he was anxious to learn and was a very hard worker," said Anderson.

Although he tried to maintain employment doing miscellaneous jobs, Norwest lost focus and fell to drugs and alcohol which landed him a stay in jail.

Concerned for the well-being of his two children Sierra, 10, and Phenix, 8, Norwest admitted to his weaknesses and knew that he had to make some changes.

"My kids are my everything," said Norwest.

He began looking for a job, submitting applications and made a resume. He explained that getting a job with

his background wasn't easy.

In 2002, he turned to Employment & Training Specialist Joe Kirk and the Social Services Department.

"Trying to find a job was hard, so I called Joe," said Norwest. "He was always there for me."

Within weeks, Kirk had found Norwest some part-time work at Times Litho, a printing shop. Norwest was grateful for the temporary position but struggled with the various and unpredictable hours. He then turned to general assistance.

"I'm so thankful for the Tribe," he said. "A lot of people take advantage of the Tribe but I honor them and all the things they have done for me."

Then, in February of 2005, Norwest met with an old friend, Brett Anderson, architect and owner of National Retail Services (NRS), spoke with Kirk and organized a plan for Norwest's goals.

"I talked with Brett about Greg's work experience," said Kirk. "He has been real easy for us to work with."

Norwest began working for Anderson shortly thereafter. His current project is remodeling a building in Portland that is eventually going to be a brewery in the back and a retail store in the front.

"His skills are growing and going to continue to grow as we go," said Ander-



Photo by Toby McClary

Back On Track — Tribal member Greg Norwest remodels a building in Portland, Oregon. Norwest has worked for the Tribe's Social Services Department since 2002.

son. "He is my right hand man."

Norwest has many job duties including layout, framing and structural upgrades. Anderson has now put him in charge of some of the decision making.

"Greg's biggest responsibility: he is my liaison," said Anderson. "He knows this project better than anyone and he always looks out for my best interest. He is a watch dog for my interest," he said. "I would put Greg head to head with anyone."

Although Norwest works for Anderson on a daily basis, he still keeps contact with Kirk on a weekly basis. Kirk has contact with both to keep updated on the progress and accomplishments of his client, Norwest.

"There will be a time when we have to let Greg go on his own," said Kirk. "At that time, Brett will be faced with

a decision to either hire Greg or let him explore his options. Whatever the decision is, we hope it will be the right one for Greg," he said.

Norwest remains interested in carpentry and hopes to continue the success he feels when a project is complete.

"This is the first time I have finished a project from beginning to end," said Norwest. "It really feels good."

Anderson spoke about his future plans for Norwest as an employee.

"I have every intention to keep him with me," said Anderson. "I have 50 rentals and I would like to stick him on all my jobs. I have affiliations with other major contractors who could expose Greg to some other skills," he said. "Getting him cross-trained would benefit both of us."

Over the last three years, Kirk and Norwest not only talk business, but have also become friends.

"Greg and I have a business relationship," said Kirk. "But as our relationship grows, we find that we have a personal relationship as well."

"I owe a lot to Joe," said Norwest. "He has helped me through some tough times."

Norwest, 34, grew up in Salem, Chiloquin and attended Roosevelt High School in Portland. He is the son of Tribal Elder Vernita Harris and Klamath Tribal Elder Calvin Shadley. He is the grandson of deceased Tribal Elder Leo Norwest who was also a builder.

Norwest now resides in Hillsboro with his girlfriend. He gets his children on the weekends and said that his spare time is devoted to them.

Norwest remembers where he has been and uses those thoughts as inspiration to lead him forward. He will begin a new job soon and as the framework progresses, another story will be added to the building of Greg Norwest's life.