

Tribal Member Comes Home To Lead Grand Ronde Education Program

■ Jackie Leno Grant takes over "a great department."

By Ron Karten

Jackie Leno Grant came all the way from her home in La Grande to give back to the Tribe. Of course, she grew up in Grand Ronde with family all over the place here.

"I had the benefit of two mothers," she said, naming her own mother, Helen Leuzinger (Leno), now passed on, and her grandmother, Tribal Elder Emma Tom Leno, also passed on. "They really watched over the grandchildren. They contributed to our moral fabric. We had a lot of family customs."

Among them were the stories "about graveyards and spirits" told by her grandfather, Tribal Elder David Leno, now passed on, but Grandmother Emma "scolded him if the stories got too scary."

She remembers Fourth of July celebrations in St. Paul. "We'd have our own little trees or sections but we were all together, too," she said.

"We always had somebody to play with," she said.

"And we did a lot of working together." She named picking berries canning and drying deer meat. "We were always around preparing foods and cutting wood. I didn't realize that that activity was not a part of everybody's world."

"We always had a strong pride in who we were," that she traces back to her grandfather. "He said, 'Never let people tell you who you are. You know who you are. Even if the federal government said you exist no longer as a Tribe, nobody can take that away. You have a culture; how you think about your world; how you do things.'"

Her grandfather also told her, "You always need to be learning things. His stories were always talking about his expectations for our behavior, how you should lead your life."



Photos by Toby McClary

Today, as Manager of the Tribe's Education Division, she said, "I see myself coming into a well-organized program. It's a great department." She named "staff" as the division's strongest attribute, "and their willingness to go the extra mile for the membership."

Her goal as new manager is to maintain the quality of those programs, while at the same time, she recognizes that "we're essentially out of space." Filled with programs for early childhood, youth education and higher education programs, the next frontier with new space, she said, is "to address the needs of students and families with special needs."

In addition, new housing units are expected to bring in more than 100 new Tribal members and Elders, two-thirds of them school aged. "We're hoping we would continue to get adults into higher education, and be able to help them upgrade their skills," said Grant.

Among priorities for the division, Grant looks to areas identified in the last few years by Tribal Council: cultural awareness, improving grades, social and emotional skills "so they can be more involved. We want to have healthy, happy youth that feel good about themselves."

"Language preservation is extremely important," she said. "And we've found that it helps with academic performance."

A new "pet project," said Grant, "is to develop a really comprehensive student intern project for the Tribe." Today, it remains a summer youth project, but there is no reason that college students and high school seniors shouldn't also be included.

The question of the trades "really needs to be explored," she said. "This is an opportunity to develop a partnership for those who want to learn a trade."

"We know that college is not for everyone," she said, though the division already supports continuing and long distance education opportunities as well as vocational programs.

"We've got the infrastructure developed already," she said. "What we need are places for students to be employed. We want students to be employable and ready for employment. That's our expectation."

Grant herself was an early beneficiary of the program she now leads. In 1973, she went back to college with a Tribal/BIA scholarship that finally — what with raising a family and all — translated into a joint psychology/business degree in 1986. She graduated from Eastern Oregon State College, (now Eastern Oregon University) in LaGrande where she lives with hus-

Education Manager & Tribal Member Jackie Leno Grant

band, Steve, owner of his own building construction company, JLG Builders.

Since 1990, until her appointment as Education Manager, Grant worked half time in the Indian Education program at Eastern Oregon University. It was a support services program, and Grant arranged for tutoring, course selection and problem solving with students. She did academic advising as well as coordinating educational and cultural programs.

Her three children, Neesha, 27, Joaquin, 26, and Jack, 21, have all continued in the building business, though Neesha and Joaquin live in Bend. Jack has a great interest in the family construction business and if he takes it over, Grant said, it will be the family's fifth generation of builders in Oregon.

Having lived the last 30 years in LaGrande, she took comfort in being near members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indians. "Even when you're away from your community," she said, "just to be around other Native people is comforting." ■

Tribal Member Looks For A Career Working With The Tribe

■ Randy Bean has overcome many obstacles while searching for stability in his life.

By Toby McClary

Construction of buildings has played a role in Tribal member Randy Bean's life for over 20 years. But a battle within himself has left Bean trying to reconstruct the most important building of all, his own personal stability.

Bean, who has struggled with unemployment since 2000 and after going from one Tribal work experience program to another, decided that it was time to find employment on his own.

"The programs at the Tribe are great," said Bean, "but I find myself becoming dependant on them."

The road to accomplishment has been rocky for Bean. He has lived in Grand Ronde for about six years and has been employed off-and-on since then as well. He walked away from a union job in 2001.

"After 9/11, the economy went to hell," said Bean. "I got tired of watching the bosses get richer, so I walked away."

In 2002, Bean was hired on to a work experience program through the Siletz Tribe. They set Bean up with a six month job working for Vern Kissinger at Chemawa Indian Boarding School. Bean thought very highly of Kissinger as did Kissinger of Bean.

"Randy was very meticulous about his work," said Kissinger. "He always did a really good job. We remodeled an



Photo by Toby McClary

Tribal member Randy Bean

x-ray room one time and it was amazing, the work that this man did," he said.

Shortly after Bean's work experience program, he stumbled over the hurdles that stood in the way of his life's path. He continued to try and find employment doing miscellaneous side jobs, but explained that his own personal problems kept holding him back.

"I had hit rock bottom," said Bean. "I guess you could say I lost my way."

Then, in 2004, Bean contacted Tribal member and Mentorship Program Coordinator Denise Harvey seeking employment through the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Within weeks, Harvey found a job for Bean doing maintenance for Grand Ronde's Hous-

ing Department. After seven months of employment, Bean was terminated.

"I blew my dream job," said Bean. "It was a great department and I would have loved to have stayed there, but I just wasn't reliable."

In April of 2005, Spirit Mountain Lodge opened their added 150 room expansion. Wanting to keep the themes current and updated, the executives of the lodge decided to do a full remodel of the existing 100 rooms beginning in June.

With an extended history of this line of work under his belt, Bean kept his eye on the remodel, knowing that he would soon be an asset to the lodge project.

In July of 2005, Bean went to the job site and asked to speak with the supervisor of Applied Waterproofing Technologies (AWT), that is doing the lodge's remodel. Bean discussed his construction background and experience with Foreman for AWT Ray Roberts. Bean was hired on-the-spot.

AWT hired with a Tribal preference on the lodge project, but Bean explained that he withheld his Tribal information because he wanted to impress the foreman with his job knowledge and not have a

Tribal advantage.

"I knew I had the skills," said Bean. "I wanted that feeling of accomplishment, the feeling of doing it on my own."

Bean's last week on the lodge project was through November 11, although he was offered a full time position with AWT in San Diego, California.

"San Diego is an option," said Bean. "If I can't find work in the Grand Ronde community, I will go. They (AWT) have treated me above and beyond any of my expectations," he said, "they are like my family."

Bean's ultimate goal is to stay in construction and work for the Tribe.

"I'm happy doing construction," he said. "I would love to start working on the Tribe's new housing project."

Bean is the son of Tribal Elder Frank Bean and the grandson of deceased Tribal Elder Fremond Bean. He lives with his grandmother, community Elder Laverne Hosford, in Grand Ronde and explains that she has helped him out a lot in life.

Tribal member Randy Bean is a good example of how to overcome life's struggles. He has been stopped by road blocks in the past, but continues to find alternative routes.

"There was a point in my life when I didn't want to go to work," said Bean, "now it is all I think about." ■