

## Shipping/Receiving's Jeff Mercier Moves To The Casino, Rick Courter Takes Mercier's Post And Virginia Roof Takes On Courter's Mail/Printing Route

By Ron Karten

Tribal member Virginia Roof is now the one on the Tribal campus who is stopped by neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night from the swift completion of her appointed rounds.

She has been providing relief for Rick Courter (Cherokee) who held the post of Mail/Printing Clerk before her, for more than a year, but in May, as Tribal member Jeff Mercier moved from the Shipping/Receiving Clerk position to a position as a Dealer at Spirit Mountain Casino, Courter moved back to the Shipping/Receiving Clerk position he used to hold.

Roof has worked for the Tribe for more than five years, first in House-keeping, and until her recent move, as the Records Clerk in the Record Retention department.

A lifelong member of the Grand Ronde Community, Roof is daughter of Tribal Elder Marvin Kimsey and Community Elder Eleanor Kimsey, and granddaughter of Tribal Elder Nora Kimsey.

Through her mom, Roof is granddaughter of McMinnville couple, Cliff and Helen Reynolds.

Her husband is community member Lonnie Roof.

In her spare time, Roof enjoys beading, making moccasins, being with her grandkids and driving or walking through the mountains.

"When I grew up, there was no reservation, no cultural ties, except Dad would supply us with deer meat and fish. When he got started in restoration, we got interested and grasped our identity. Before that, I didn't think about it. I guess we were a little discriminated against in school, but the school



Photo by Ron Karten

**Rick Courter**  
Shipping/Receiving Clerk

Tribe and the previous five at Spirit Mountain Casino.

"I worked the first five years with the casino. I was part of grand opening," said Courter. He worked there in the Food and Beverage department.

He started in Tribal government in Shipping and Receiving, moved over to mail delivery for three years, and now is back at Shipping and Receiving.

The difference in the two positions is that Shipping and Receiving deals with packages and the package delivery companies, and the mail position picks up and delivers regular mail, interoffice mail, magazines and the like throughout the Tribe's government.

Shipping/Receiving also handles all of the maintenance for the Tribe's vehicles.

"I was always routine," said Courter of his Mail department days. "You could always depend on my coming by."

Tribal Director of Internal Audits, Trudi Yoshikawa, used to call him "Two-A-Day" because he came by once in the morning to deliver stuff from the post office, and pick up the mail in the afternoon.

"He's regular as clock-work," said Yoshikawa. "You can tell the time of day by when he picks up the mail at your department. He takes his schedule seriously and he gets it done."

There's always at least 500 pieces of mail to deliver, but there could be 200-1000, depending on the day, exclusive of the bulk mailings.

Shipping/Receiving work loads vary, too, said Courter. "Some days there's not much; some days the whole room could be full."

"You never know until the truck gets there how much there will be to do. And you never know when there's a mass mailing coming."

Courter was born and raised in Dallas and has lived in the area in recent years while working for the casino and the Tribe.

Courter spent 10 years in the Navy. He was based in San Diego and Norfolk, VA.

"My travels took me to many different countries and cultures, he said. "It was a very educational experience. In the Navy, we went to the Mediterranean, to Asia and Australia. The Caribbean islands were my favorites. But all were a new and different experience from living here in the states."

"I know just about everybody here and really like it here a lot. Just really enjoy doing

what I do to help the Tribe in any way I can."

His interests include pro and college football, as well as hunting and fishing and other outdoors activities.

His only relative among Tribal members is his nephew, Gibson Mercier, 3.

The instigator of all these moves is Tribal member Jeff Mercier, who first took the leap from the Governance side of the Tribe to the Casino side.

"It's culture shock," said Mercier, after a month and a half as a dealer at the casino, "just because of the enormity of the whole thing. The vastness of the types of people and the types of jobs. I found adjusting to working at the casino as challenging as the job itself."

Mercier's new work includes dealing blackjack, Spanish, 21, Single 21, 4-card poker, 3-card poker, and Let 'er Ride. "In school," he said, "those are the ones you learn."

"I didn't take the job right out of class. I had so much invested working (on the government side)." He had spent 15 plus years on the government side. "Those that are not family to me are like family. It was two months before I took the job, and now, I'm relearning everything."

It was "time to make a change," he said, "to try something new."

Mercier started working for the Tribe in the summer youth programs of 1990, when he was junior in high school.

"When I started, we were still in the Depot Building. The program moved down to the old Mahurin Building for at least a couple

years."

"In high school," he said, "I was a floater for probably five to seven years. I spent time in just about every office. Then, right out of high school, going to college part time, I was answering phones. I was a secretary in every office. I put together flyers. You paid your dues doing every little grunt job."

For a year or two, he was in the mail room off and on part time. Then he took that position full-time for four or five years. While he was there, the department turned into the Procurement Department, and then he moved to the Shipping and Receiving position for nearly three years.

"As a Tribal member, opportunities are there, definitely," he said. "I think more so than people really know. It is different than what I imagined. There are a lot of opportunities for advancement within that department and plenty of other departments."

Tribal Elder Joseph (Sonny) Mercier (passed in 2003) was his dad, and Tribal Elder Francis Mercier is his mom.

"The Procurement Department has been my family for 10 plus



Photo by Ron Karten

**Virginia Roof**  
Mail/Printing Clerk

years. Going to work was like going to work with my immediate family. Not seeing them on a daily basis (now) is one of the pains of having this current job."

"I didn't get the opportunity to thank the Tribe, past and present councils, from its infancy to a multi-million dollar corporation," he said. "I feel like I was part of this large tree from you know, the seedling. Anyone that's been here 10 plus years, feel part of that investment. Anyone that's been here 15 years plus, this Tribe feels like a child to you. You feel very protective of it."

"It's knowing we invested in something we truly love. A job in something you're a part of. The pains of growing into a corporation can be challenging for someone who was here when it was — a thrift store of sorts. It's happened almost overnight." ■

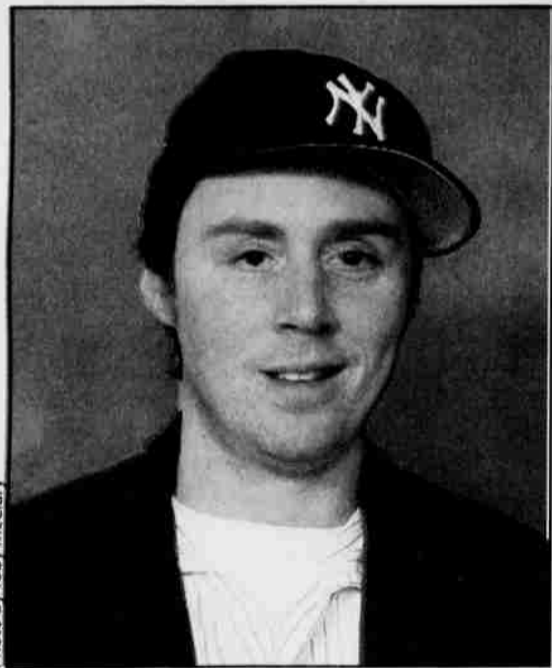


Photo by Toby McClary

**Jeff Mercier**  
Dealer At Spirit Mountain Casino

and students then were known as the Grand Ronde Indians. We had sweat lodges, though.

She also has children and grandchildren of her own. Roof is mom to Joshua Baker, 26, who is a dealer at the casino, and grandmom to Jonathan 9, Sasheene, 7, and Kaleaha Simi, one month (Joshua's children).

Rick Courter, Cherokee, has worked almost five years for the