

## Where are they now: A Glimpse At The Success Of The 2003-2004 Hatfield Fellow

By Angie Sears, Tribal Mentee

Bryan Mercier, a 33 year-old Grand Ronde Tribal member, went to work on Capitol Hill as a Hatfield Fellow in 2003 and has since made a career out of representing Indian Country at a state and federal level.

Prior to entering the Fellowship, Mercier attended the University of Oregon where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management. During his senior year, he went to Germany as an exchange student where he studied economics and played semi-pro soccer.

After completing his undergraduate studies, Mercier enrolled in a graduate program at Freiburg University where he received a Master's certificate in Economics.

Next, Mercier moved on to Spain to study human rights and law at the University of Charles II and before he knew it his one year exchange program had turned into a seven year stay.

Mercier first entered D.C. in the summer of 2003 as a Morris K. Udall intern in Senator Gordon Smith's office. The internship was quite a success. In fact, Senator Smith wrote a letter of recommendation for Mercier as part of his application for the Hatfield Fellowship. They had high hopes that if chosen for the fellowship, Mercier could return to Smith's office and continue to gain invaluable experience from Smith and his staff.

When Mercier was chosen as the Hatfield Fellow and placed back in Smith's office, he was able to fall right back into the work he had been doing earlier that year.

"I had the advantage of previously developing a portfolio and working in Indian Affairs. Senator Smith had been awarded a seat on the Indian Affairs Committee in early 2003, so when I came in, I helped him develop his portfolio and get him engaged. I helped in getting him up to speed on some of the issues that affect Oregon Tribes, and then for the rest of the year I handled that portfolio," said Mercier. "I also helped out on some of the finance committee and commerce committee tasks, but 85-90 percent of my time was spent on Indian Affairs."

Mercier's most valued experience was in the first piece of legislation he had passed with Senator Smith, which was the Congressional Resolution recognizing the 20-year Restoration of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

"I was allowed to draft that ... the Senator agreed to expedite the passage of the Bill, and I got to go down on the Floor when he did it. We got it through within 24 hours, which is almost unheard of. So we were actually able to coincide the resolution with the date of our Restoration and the date of our 20-year Restoration Celebration that we held in Grand Ronde. And that was the first piece of legislation that I had passed," Mercier said. "That was probably my proudest moment."

In addition to learning the ins and outs of the legislative process,



Photo courtesy of Chris Mercier

Tribal member Bryan Mercier

he values the contacts he developed while working in Washington and credits actually knowing who the technical and legislative experts are as the key to getting things done.

Mercier, a life-long democrat with somewhat progressive views, valued his experiences working with Senator Smith. He held a great level of admiration for Smith as a representative of Oregon, and as a person who genuinely cared about helping Indian people.

"Bryan Mercier was well liked. He was smart, very hard working, and dedicated to the tasks that were put before him. He did a lot of work with the Tribal Forest Protection Act, and with our natural resources legislative staff focusing on forestry issues. Every turn, he proved to be very knowledgeable and capable. He was an asset to Senator Smith and his staff," said R.C. Hammond, spokesman for Senator Smith. "Everyone liked him a lot."

Upon completion of the Fellowship, Mercier began working for the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) where he was a community development associate. He worked on developing task force initiatives for NCAI and had the opportunity to work with former Hatfield Fellow, Alyssa Macy. The two former Fellows worked together on the 2004 Native Vote campaign.

After working with NCAI for a short period, Mercier received a job offer from the U.S. Forest Service as a policy analyst for the Office of Tribal Relations. This was a newly created position for the forest service, which gave Mercier an opportunity to help build the office from the ground up.

"When I was on the Hill I had actually drafted legislation that affected the creation of this office," he said. "So I had an opportunity to implement legislation that I had a small hand in passing."

Mercier spent two years going through the growing pains of developing a new office in what he considered a very traditional agency.

"The Forestry Service has a very

strong culture that has not always been on a good level with Indian Country. Trying to change that culture was a big task, and it's one that I don't feel was accomplished when I left the position three weeks ago; however, we were able to accomplish the task of internally educating the Forest Service about Trust responsibilities, and the culturally appropriate ways of working with Native American Tribes on a government-to-government basis. That's something that hasn't been done at that level in the Forestry Service before," said Mercier.

One of his proudest achievements in that position was the creation of a capacity building curriculum for Native American Firefighters that was designed to help them transform into small business owners. The plan was to teach them to do reforestation work and contract work for the Forest Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and for their own Tribes as a way to continue working during the off season.

"Almost half of our nations firefighting force are Native Americans. Firefighters are seasonal and spend much of the year unemployed, and that's a big problem," said Mercier. "In the two years that I was there, I was able to jumpstart a program

where the Forest Service allocated funds to train these folks to do forestry work. It's a great program."

Today, Mercier works for the Department of Treasury in the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund. The Agency helps build financial services in Indian Country. The department set aside \$5 million in an appropriations bill to build banks, credit unions, and revolving loan funds for institutions that provide lending to Native Americans.

Mercier credits the Fellowship for his experiences and for advancing his career up to 10 years. "Working in Congress with the brightest, most motivated, and efficient people in the country tends to rub off on you. You really learn how to be a stellar employee," he said.

He also credits the program for giving Native people an opportunity to gain valuable congressional experience that they would not otherwise have an opportunity to receive, and wishes other Tribes would create programs like the Hatfield Fellowship.

"It grows our leaders. The series about past Hatfield Fellows proves that it works. Alyssa Macy, Bodie Shaw, and Pete Wakeland, they've all gone on to do great things. I consider myself to be someone who will continue to do good things, and I know the new Hatfield Fellow, Dennis Worden, will as well. We would never have had this opportunity if it wasn't for the Hatfield Fellowship," said Mercier. "It was the best professional experience of my life." ■

### Native American Applicants Sought For Hatfield Fellowship

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde announce that applications for the Mark O. Hatfield Congressional Fellowship are now available. Each year, a Hatfield Fellow serves as an intern for a member of Oregon's Congressional delegation.

The Hatfield Fellow is selected from adult Native American applicants, who are enrolled members of a federally recognized Tribe in Oregon. If there are no qualified applicants from Oregon, enrolled members of federally recognized Tribes in Washington, Idaho, and Montana will be considered.

The candidate will intern in Washington, D.C. for nine months and will receive a monthly stipend, relocation and travel expenses, and tuition for the American Political Science Association orientation.

Deadline for applications is 5 p.m. April 20, 2007. Applicants will then be notified if they qualify for interviews. Late applications will not be accepted. Application packets may be obtained by contacting Louis King at Spirit Mountain Community Fund 503-879-1462, email at louis.king@grandronde.org, or by mail at 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, OR 97347.

The Fellowship honors Mark Hatfield for his accomplishments as a United States Senator, a former Governor of Oregon, and for his mentorship of many leaders in their own communities.

**Deadline is Friday, April 20, 2007.**