

Casino Expansion Is Good News For Tribal Workers

By Ron Karten

Three large projects at Spirit Mountain Casino are providing a watershed of work opportunities for Tribal members, thanks to the efforts of Tribal Mentorship and Workforce Development Coordinator Denise Harvey.

Three years ago, Harvey saw the need for other workforce development programs. Tribal Council saw it too, and added a new piece to her job description.

Today, Harvey is reaching out to companies and other job providers, as well as reaching within the Tribe to provide all kinds of employment services, such as résumé writing, interviewing skills and job applications for Tribal members.

The move into workforce development turned out to be so important that it now consumes 70 percent of Harvey's time.

As part of that effort, Harvey sits on the board for the Oregon Tradeswomen Inc, a pre-apprenticeship program in Portland; and on the Youth Committee for the Enterprise Youth Council in Salem, covering Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties.

She works with the carpenters' union to establish a pre-apprenticeship program at the Tribe where Tribal members can get their basic construction skills.

In addition, she works with the Oregon Department of Transportation Workforce Alliance, and Construction Apprenticeship Workforce Solutions to diversify the construction workforce.

Starting in April, she said, Tribal Council funds will make it possible for Tribal members to take an eight-week training program with the carpenters.

"Sitting on these boards keeps me connected and gives me the ability to work with employers, to network, and to stay aware of available resources," said Harvey.

With the upcoming casino expansion come three related projects that just scream for Harvey's talents, and she is using those talents

in a number of ways to continue bringing more Tribal members into the workforce.

Harvey's work on these projects, the casino expansion itself; the Playworld part of the project that will provide a separate building for the existing arcade; and the Spirit Mountain Water Treatment Expansion to accommodate increased water usage, focuses on promoting Tribal preference with contractors doing the work.

The Tribe asked Harvey to work with contractors to promote Tribal and Native preference on construction sites.

In that regard, Harvey aims to "make it as easy as possible for contractors," she said. One called her last week needing two construction employees.

"We took care of everything," she said. She evaluated Tribal member's backgrounds to make sure they had the right, negotiated wages, and assisted with the application process.

Among the workers who received assistance were Tribal members Andrew and Chris Freeman, now working on the excavation for the new Playworld.

For the hotel expansion project last year, Harvey put about 40 Tribal members to work.

"My goal isn't to make sure that all jobs are for Tribal members.

My goal is to see that there are opportunities for Tribal members," she said.

Over the years, Harvey's efforts have nonetheless been successful. In the last three, she estimates, more than 100 Tribal members, Na-



Tribal member and Tribal Mentorship & Workforce Development Coordinator Denise Harvey

Photo by Ron Karten

perience with not just one aspect of the organization, but every side."

Tribal member Angela Sears also did the rounds for her mentorship, and today continues her mentorship in the Tribal Public Affairs office. She is writing and editing copy at *Smoke Signals* and is currently struggling with editing different writing styles. Does a phrase really need to be changed, or is it just another proper way to say the same thing, she wants to know?

The challenge for Harvey is "finding that right environment," she said. "It's hard to teach people how to mentor," but many connections are very successful.

Tribal member Cory Meneley was mentored during 2005-2006 at the Natural Resources Department by Fish and Wildlife Coordinator Kelly Dirksen. Dirksen gave him a lot of opportunities, from working on the fish weir to working with biologists in the field. The experience made such an impression on Meneley that he decided to continue his education in the natural resources field.

Harvey also wrestles with qualification issues. "Sometimes there is no either/or provision so applicants need both education and experience to qualify," she said.

"We have Tribal members with Masters degrees but no work experience, so they can't get a job."

When the Tribe awards scholarships for education, there is always an emphasis on giving back to the Tribe. "So they get their degrees and then expect to work for the Tribe, but they don't always have opportunities," she said.

The mentorship program does not guarantee Tribal members a job when the program is over. "It is just an opportunity to show their abilities," said Harvey.

Today, Harvey also focuses on getting Native-owned businesses involved in Tribal projects, and anticipates in the future extending her services to the Portland and Eugene areas. ■

tive Americans and their families have benefited.

While many of the jobs that Harvey makes possible are with outside companies, the Mentorship program pairs Tribal members with Tribal or Casino departments.

Tribal member James Buxman worked in many departments during his mentorship from 2002-2004, and today he is the Casino's Advertising Manager.

"Love it. Can't ask for anything more," he said. He credited the program's diverse offerings for his success; "the ability to work with numerous departments, gaining ex-

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