



Recently in Grand Ronde, four students (right photo, clockwise from top right) Cameron Garvin (Siletz), and Tribal members Nakoa Mercier, Iyana Holmes and Sophia Morningstar came out to watch quail babies that had made a home for themselves in the preschool playground. Even while the photos were being taken, the birds packed up their belongings and headed west. And they haven't been seen again.

Photos by Ron Karten

Sharp Students

■ Carvers are now making their own tools.

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Although there is something beautiful about making carving tools, and then getting down to work on projects, the impetus behind the latest effort at the Tribal carving class was much more practical.

"I was running out of tools to lend out," said carver Adam McIsaac, who leads the group and provides materials, including 01 tool steel.

"A good high-carbon steel," McIsaac said.

Creating carving tools involves superheating the tool steel with a propane torch.

McIsaac started the class with blocks of wood on which he had stapled different grits of sandpaper. At the end of each block, he wrote the grit number with a marker — 220, 320, 400, 600 — with the lowest numbers used first and the highest numbers doing the finest job of sanding.



Tribal member Travis Mercier, left, holds the propane torch as carving instructor Adam McIsaac bends a blade on the anvil.

Photo by Ron Karten

Carving blades are held flat and sanded across the width of the blade until all grits are used and the bottom of the blade has a shiny surface. Then, the process is repeated for the edges.

The blade is then clamped to a table with the top up, and using a file in the cutting direction only, an angle is cre-

ated on the top edges. Then, the edges are sanded sharp, again using a succession of increasingly finer grits until the edges are shiny like the bottom.

Then the blade is tempered with the propane torch, and if the blade is to be curved at the end, it is bent while it is hot.

Tribal Elder Bob Watson, a recognized artist and carver for many years since his retirement, was making handles out of purpleheart wood, an exotic hardwood found in Central and South America. His neighbor had a pile and gave him some small pieces that are perfect

for knife handles. Many of McIsaac's tool handles are made of maple.

The idea is to reserve at least half of the blade to be secured to the handle. Cultural language coordinator Tony Johnson (Chinook), who is also a silversmith, said that he often wishes his tools had a smaller cutting surface with more attached to the handle because the tools are easier to control, with less undesirable vibration (chatter), when they are shorter.

A chunk is cut out of the handle to match the blade that will fit there.

The blade is epoxied in place and then wrapped with string, which holds it well and allows for many years of use.

And when blades dull, or when they drop on the floor, point first, carvers who have made their own tools sharpen them again. ■