

MacLaren programs helpful to Leno

LENO continued
from front page

Castellon. Leno, 17 at the time, had been drinking heavily before the accident.

Today, with a scheduled release date of Feb. 8, Leno is amazed by the number of youth he's seen coming and going from MacLaren, taking nothing from their experience.

"It's hard to do your time," he said, leaning back against a 4-by-4 on the sidelines, "because all these guys come and go. I could see them back and forth two or three times. It makes it hard because you don't see them trying, or improving. You've changed inside, how you live your life, and you're still sitting there while others are constantly in trouble (with contraband or fights). That's the hardest part."

Working with dogs beneficial

Leno has benefited from a number of programs at MacLaren. He worked with dogs for 18 months in the Project Pooch program.

"It was great," he said. "It helps you to step outside of yourself, and not just for yourself." He cited the sense of responsibility and patience as benefits.

"They can't understand you," Leno said, "so you have to find a way to communicate."

In addition, Leno found that the program gave him a sense of himself beyond the walls of MacLaren. "Being able to be around the animals was more of a sense of being out in the world, and, for me, also at home because we always had animals."

Since August 2006, Leno has been at the youth facility in Florence where outside construction-type work has afforded him a little more freedom. And new skills. He's built walls there and laid foundations for a home. And earned a little money in the process.

Leno also earned an associate degree from Chemeketa Community College while at MacLaren and in

Florence.

He decided on sociology as a result of a tip from Sam Cole, one of a few friends who dropped by the pow-wow to visit that day.

"At first, I didn't feel like I understood it," Leno said, "but I got good grades. Over time, it got better and I realized I could tie it in with prevention, and that it suited me."

His current goal is to enroll in one of Oregon's universities – maybe Oregon State University – to earn bachelor's and ultimately master's degrees in sociology.

His goal also includes working at the Tribe. "I want to give back to the community," he said. "I do feel that I have a leg up coming through this facility, being around all the youth, listening to their stories. I know what has worked for them and what hasn't. And I know what has worked for me and what hasn't."

What worked for Leno is this: surprisingly, he said, "It's by sitting there and hearing somebody else's story."

The family's help

The Leno family has been a driving force in both Brad's attitude and in the MacLaren Pow-wow. Brad's father, Tribal member Lonnie, has been bringing salmon for the pow-wows and cooking them in the traditional way since Brad's incarceration began.

He started with 20 fish in 2002, Lonnie said, and this year brought and barbecued 40.

Also this year, MacLaren presented Lonnie with an award for his efforts that also have included joining the facility's Natives in sweats over the years.

"For me," Brad said, "my parents have been the biggest support for me. All my accomplishments are due to their support."

They have come to see Brad as much as four times a week, he said.

"It became their routine and I'm very thankful for that," he said.

"I see a young man that has grown up in the last six years as far as maturity, patience, someone who has pretty much put his life in order as to what he wants to do and how he wants to go about it," Lonnie said. "I see someone that has definitely set some goals for himself."

And Lonnie said that those goals include financial.

"He has a better idea as to how to invest his money," Lonnie said. "His mom took on a part-time job with a financial institution some years ago when Brad was beginning his sentence. As time went on

and he started accumulating moneys in his account with the Tribe and as he did odd jobs at MacLaren and Florence, he realized it was a good idea to invest some moneys.

"I see a lot of kids his age still carrying their money around in their pocket until they don't have it anymore."

In truth, not all Tribal members at MacLaren have the support of family and friends. "For a lot of kids," Brad said, "they go years without a visit."

"I think he has made very good use of that six-and-a-quarter years," Lonnie said. "As a parent, going through these situations, Brad being 17 years old and going to prison for six-and-a-quarter years, none of us knew how it was going to turn out, but because of the way Brad chose to handle the whole situation,



Brad's brother, Tribal member Brett Leno, plants another stake full of salmon at the 11th annual MacLaren Pow-wow in early September. Since Brad's first pow-wow at the correctional institution in 2002, the Leno family has provided salmon for all, cooking it in the traditional way.

he made it as easy as possible."

And Lonnie doesn't just mean that Brad made it easier for Brad. "You never heard him say, 'I don't deserve to be here.' He always said, 'I did something wrong. I'm here because of it and I'll make the best of it.' That made it a lot easier for us, too."

"The thing that I am pleased about," said Brad's mom, Tammy, "is the growth that Brad has done. I didn't expect him to grow up as fast as he did and come out with a very positive outlook on things. It has made him a better person. I never expected it to turn out this well."

Getting ready for freedom

For Brad, the return to regular living is still daunting. "I'm hoping it won't be as big of a deal as I'm expecting it to be," he said. "I have been completely structured." His friends tell him that the first couple of days will be a little strange. "I heard that from others who have gotten out," he said.

"This past month has already been stressful as everything's coming together. Where are you gonna live? Work? Who's picking you up?"

He mentioned to a friend that he might take some time off when he first gets out, put off university until the fall, but all that's still up in the air. Too much free time may have been part of his downfall to begin with, he observed, but he's going into this next phase with open eyes.

"A lot of guys put this (experience) behind them and never talk about it," Leno said. "They don't want to be reminded of those days. But, for me, I want to be able to use the experiences I've gotten here for what I want to do in life, for working with youth."

One of his friends, Mark Ieban, having fun, introduced himself as "the professor." When it was time to go, the professor offered, "Give me a call man, if you need anybody to talk to."

And so his future begins. ■



Photos by Ron Katten

At Grand Entry, the Leno family is honored with the first position. Tribal member Lonnie Leno, Brad's father, looks at the award presented to him moments before for his contributions to the pow-wow. From left is Lonnie, Brett behind, Brad's mother, Tammy, Brad and his aunt, Tribal Elder Darlene Aaron.