

# Activity Center, and self-esteem, going up

Tribal employment programs find construction jobs for Tribal, community members

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Lincoln City-based Quade Commercial Construction has been building and upgrading facilities for the Grand Ronde Tribe almost since the beginning.

The first project, Superintendent Craig Hoffman recalls, was remodeling the Tribal Community Center eight years ago.

Today, at work on the Elders' Activity Center located west of the Elder Foster Care buildings, Hoffman and Quade Commercial are a vital part of the Tribe's Workforce Development Program, bringing in Tribal and community members who have learned construction skills as part of the Preapprenticeship Program and are now earning a regular paycheck, as well as gaining the kind of self-esteem that pays dividends daily.

"I'd never really done this building stuff before," said community member Ezequiel (Zeke) Jones, 25, who went through the Tribe's Preapprenticeship Program last year. He is married to Tribal member Shawn Hostler.

"It was just something I knew I liked," Jones said, taking a break from building a wall on the second floor of the Elders' Activity Center.

"Zeke is my number one student as far as how it turned his life around," said Tribal member and the Tribe's Preapprenticeship Program Coordinator Denise Harvey.

"He was there every day on time. He worked hard and when job opportunities came up, he took them. His family told me, he is just a different person today."

And Jones makes no bones about his life before the Preapprenticeship Program. He was cooling his heels in three different prisons.

"They take the time to teach you the skills," Jones said. "It did take me awhile to catch on to some things, but they didn't freak out."

"On any of our construction projects, I try to make opportunities



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Tribal member Daniel Mooney nails a board as he works on building the Elders' Activity Center on Tuesday, March 25. Mooney went through the Tribe's Preapprenticeship Program.**

for Tribal, Native or local people," Harvey said.

The Elders' Activity Center is the fifth project that the Workforce Development and Preapprenticeship programs have been involved in. Many working on the Elders' Activity Center, in fact, worked on the casino southern expansion and came over to the center when their employment ended on the casino project.

On all Tribal construction projects, Harvey approaches the construction companies working for the Tribe with an offer to take advantage of the Workforce Development and Preapprenticeship programs and the people who have learned basic skills through the programs.

"(Quade lead carpenter) Paul (Goetz) does a lot of teaching," said Tribal member Daniel Mooney, 30. "He's right there on everything with us."

Mooney names layouts, framing and working around cranes as skills he's picked up on the job.

"I'm liking it so far," Mooney said. Now, he's learning to add brackets for the building's trusses. "You get

to learn a new skill every day."

"It has worked out," Hoffman said. "They've shown that they have the ability to work in construction. They've learned something out of those classes."

The alternative, Hoffman said, is "hiring off the street and teaching" the necessary skills.

Tribal descendant Kristy Mikkelsen also went through the Preapprenticeship Program and worked on the casino expansion before coming over to the Activity Center on the Tribal campus.

"It's a lot better than just jumping in," Mikkelsen said.

"The construction trade is not just for men," said Harvey. "It's also for women. A lot of women don't think construction is for them, but obviously it is."

"The more you teach," said long-time Quade carpenter and Tribal member Ward Blanchard, 46, "the more they learn."

"It's hard to measure those results," Harvey said, "but I really believe that some of that work reflects our mission

statement, providing opportunity, building strong healthy families, and creating a sustainable economic foundation for generations. When you have a Tribal member who can now take care of themselves and their families, it raises their self-esteem."

The Preapprenticeship Program is interviewing new people all the time, Harvey added.

"Especially with our housing, with families moving here, they have increased my numbers. I'm the one program that can assist the family members of our Tribal families. The Tribal member can get the housing, but there are no other resources to help family members find jobs."

The three-month courses bring in about 15 students per session, and the Preapprenticeship Program has a backlog of some 25 Tribal members and 20 more community members who are interested in finding employment.

"When I get a list of skills needed for a job," Harvey said, "I first go through my list of Tribal members and then go to the community member list."

"It's just about somebody taking the time to teach and empower them. There's always a little risk but you just have a belief in them that you can make a difference in their lives. You give them the tools, empower them and be supportive of them."

"It builds their self-esteem and once you get that going, you just try to build on it."

"The end result is not just the number of people working. If you have one success, then the program is a success. And even if some didn't find their niche, they were given skills that they can use in their life and at home."

Anticipated completion of the Elders' Activity Center is this summer. Meanwhile, Harvey is counting on new construction projects, such as the upcoming fire station, to create new positions for Tribal and community members. ■

## New photojournalist joins Tribal publications staff

Michelle Alaimo began shooting on March 3 for Smoke Signals

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Michelle Alaimo joined the Publications Department staff on March 3 as the new Tribal photojournalist, succeeding Toby McClary, who left in early November to accept a supervisory position at Spirit Mountain Casino.

Alaimo, 33, previously worked for six years at *The News-Review* in Roseburg, Ore., as an assignment editor and photojournalist.

Before that, she worked as a photojournalist in Merced, Calif., Marshfield, Wis., Attleboro, Mass., and Canandaigua, N.Y.

She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in photojournalism from the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York state, and is familiar with several brands of digital cameras, processing pro-

**Name:** Michelle Alaimo

**Age:** 33

**Born:** Rochester, N.Y.

**Tribal job:** Photojournalist

**Education:** Photojournalism degree from Rochester Institute of Technology

**Quote:** "I've already met a lot of great people and covered many interesting events in my few weeks here. I'm excited about this opportunity and look forward to what the future holds."

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grams, photography software and scanning equipment.

"Michelle brings a good combination of personality, technical ability and creative eye to the position," Publications Coordinator Dean

Rhodes said. "It was difficult replacing Toby's four years of experience with the department, but I think we've found a good fit."

Alaimo has received four photography awards in the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association Better Newspaper Contest, including a first-place finish in 2006.

She also is a member of the National Press Photographers Association.

She grew up in Fairport, N.Y., a suburb of Rochester. Her parents are retired and she is the youngest of three children.

She lives in McMinnville with her dog and two cats.

"I've already met a lot of great people and covered many interesting events in my few weeks here," she said. "I'm excited about this opportunity and look forward to what the future holds." ■



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Michelle Alaimo