

Dance step by dance step

'Crazy Evie' Stancliffe is a Tribal member who follows her dreams

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Grand Ronde Tribal member Evie Stancliffe, 22, just finished her debut professional dancing gig.

As the Yakama Sun Kings basketball team's only Native American dancer during the 2007-08 season, Stancliffe brought her brand of optimism and excitement to a team that is nevertheless on the brink of extinction.

"I like to dance," Stancliffe said. "It's always been something fun to me."

She said she dances at clubs "or just around my house. I like music so sometimes I'll just dance around to have fun."

For the Sun Kings' gig, "We put in a couple hours of learning a dance and doing jumps and spins with different things to show our abilities. Then, at the end of the audition, we performed in front of judges. They scored us and they announced the girls who made the squad."

"I went in pretty confident just because I wanted to make sure. Usually when I do things, I do them with confidence because people can tell. I think it showed and that helped. I would do my best and that was all I could do."

As a member of the Sun Kings dancers, she practiced twice weekly.

"We were constantly learning new routines," she said.

After dancing at this season's 24 home games, Stancliffe is wistful about the team's potential demise, but her dreams eclipse the fleeting fame that professional dancing provided.

The team may yet survive, according to the YakimaHerald.com Web site, though the Yakama Tribe voted convincingly early in April to close down the operation after years of losing money. Efforts are afoot,

according to the Web site, to keep the team going or sell it if a buyer can be found.

The Sun Kings are part of the Continental Basketball Association, the minor league for the NBA.

The professional dancing gig paid her \$10 a game — "You had to do it because you loved it," she said — and started for Stancliffe in June when the central Washington team held tryouts. Without any professional dancing lessons or experience, she showed up.

But her long-term ambition is beauty school. The Gene Juarez Academy in Seattle specifically. The dream may still be off in the future, however, owing to the cost of the 1,600-hour curriculum.

"I'm just trying to save my money," Stancliffe said.

Stancliffe was always very active at Toppenish High School. She served in clubs, community service and sports.

"I did FFA (Future Farmers of America)," she said. "I raised pigs. It was fun. I enjoyed it except for the smell. I would buy them as babies and raise them for a couple months until the livestock show. I liked the connection they had with you when you'd lead them around."

She also was her school's Distributive Education Clubs of America chapter president. DECA is an international business-preparatory organization that "exists to develop the leadership skills of marketing students for success in business and their lives."

At DECA competitions, Stancliffe said, "You would be given a certain scenario, applying for such and such job, for example. You were pretty much judged on the interview."

She uses what she learned there,

she said, "in every interview."

Stancliffe also played high school volleyball, basketball, cheerleading and track.

"I really enjoyed being active," she said. "Always as long as I can remember."

In high school, she said, "I organized the first book program where I would read to other children. And I organized book donations. I also did the oral health care program. We called it 'the Tooth Fairy Academy.'"

"I'd go to health fairs and teach young children about the proper way to brush their teeth. It was really fun because I always dressed up like a tooth fairy. I think it makes the kids listen better. It catches their attention."

It also helped, she said, to get "down to their level" when she showed them how to brush the big teeth of the puppet she used for demonstrations.

"Usually, I'd have the kids take the toothbrush right there and help them if they were having trouble. Teachers would call me to go to their classrooms to do the presentation."

Most recently, during the Sun Kings' season, she initiated two classes a week where she taught dancing to children from the community.

None of which is to say that Stancliffe sacrifices her own dreams. Just before *Smoke Signals* went to



Photo courtesy of the Yakama Sun Kings

Tribal member Evie Stancliffe

press, she was planning a trip to San Diego.

"I am determined to follow all of my dreams," she said, "and surfing is next on my list." She's not sure she'll be very good in just a few days, she said, "but you have to start somewhere."

She was raised in Toppenish on the Yakama Reservation. Her grandmother is Hazel Gibson (Yakama) of Toppenish, Wash., and her grandfather is Leroy Strong (Yakama) of Wapato, Wash. She has seven brothers and sisters enrolled in the Grand Ronde Tribe.

Her nickname is "Crazy Evie."

"People just think I'm crazy because I'm so spontaneous. It's what I've got to do to keep it interesting," she said. ■

Indian Taco fundraiser



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Elder and Vietnam veteran
Steve Rife, left, refills Tribal Elder Gene LaBonte's coffee cup during an Indian taco fundraiser on Monday, April 14, at the Tribal Community Center. Rife, who will recreate his 2007 Walk of Tears beginning June 28 and culminating at Veterans' Powwow on July 11, held four taco fundraisers to raise money. Half of the proceeds will help fund the walk and the other half will go to the Native American Veterans Association. Above, Glenda Croy makes an Indian taco during the taco fundraiser. Croy volunteered to help Rife.