

Luhui Whitebear's dedication to serving Native communities wins numerous awards

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

The awards hanging on the walls of Grand Ronde Scholarship Coordinator Luhui Whitebear's (Chumash) office show a long and consistent effort to be of value.

"I know what it's like to have to pay back loans," she said from her office in the Adult Education Building.

And though she applied for many scholarships when she went to college, Whitebear now says that she didn't apply for nearly as many as she recommends to tomorrow's Tribal college students.

"Lu has been an amazing resource," said Tribal member Amanda Monk, one of two Tribal Gates Millennium Scholars and currently a student at George Fox University in Newberg. "I don't think that I would have been able to get the Gates Scholarship without her help."

"One of my favorite things," Whitebear said, "is helping students with the application."

She worked through her college years at Oregon State's Longhouse and at the university's Indian Education Office.

"Students also come in to get help with their applications, sometimes several times for the same application. There are also students who e-mail me scholarship requests or to have me look over their essays. Pretty much anyone who is going on to obtain a higher education can request help with their scholarships. And the Higher Education programs are not limited to a geographical area so we get calls from all over."

"Even if they don't win it," Whitebear added, "they learn a lot about themselves and get writing practice. And when they win, you should see how happy they are."

Whitebear helped Monk with "all eight of the essays" for the Gates Scholars application process. "She also sends out any new scholarship information related to my major (nursing)," Monk wrote from college.

Whitebear's expertise is undeniable because she worked as a reader for two years for the Gates Millennium Scholars.

All along, she has been expanding her contacts in the world of financial aid.

"I like being able to work with different (college) campuses across the country," Whitebear said. "Learning what's out there."

"Working with financial aid offices and having a good relationship with them is real important for our students. They're the ones that are really helping our students."

Whitebear administers funding through the Tribe's Competitive Scholarship Program for 84 Tribal members pursuing degrees ranging from associate degrees to doctoral degrees, and she tracks their academic progress.

Awards show

Luhui's commitment

From Taft High School in Lincoln City, Whitebear, 28, won the national Yoshiyama Award from the Hitachi Foundation for "exemplary service to the community." She was nominated for this 1997 award for



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Luhui Whitebear, scholarship coordinator for the Tribe, left, works on a scholarship application with Klairice Westley, an early childhood education major at Chemeketa Community College, on Thursday, April 24. Whitebear recently won two awards including the Outstanding New Professional from the Western Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators for 2007-08 and the Outstanding Indian Volunteer of the Year Award for 2008 from the Oregon Indian Education Association.

Misconceptions about the scholarship process

Grand Ronde Scholarship Coordinator Luhui Whitebear said there are misconceptions about the Tribal scholarship process.

They include:

- ◆ Some believe that scholarships or the Tribe will cover all college expenses. "Financial aid," she said, "was never designed to pay for everything. Students have to apply for different kinds of funding." The Tribe, also, may not cover all student expenses.
- ◆ There is a misconception that if the student or the parents work, the student will not be eligible for a scholarship. Not true, Whitebear said. "Those students may still be eligible for a scholarship."
- ◆ There is a feeling that scholarship committees are only looking for straight-A students. "They're looking for leaders," Luhui said. They are not interested in students reporting their four-points, but they want to hear about the person applying; how they look at and handle situations."
- ◆ "A lot of students assume that they will automatically receive a Tribal Competitive Scholarship if they turn in an application," Whitebear said. "I like to remind them that it is a competitive program and not everyone who applies will necessarily receive a scholarship." Probably the biggest misconception comes from students who think filling out an application is too much work. "For three hours work," Whitebear said, "you can get \$3,000. They don't weigh that out versus how long it's going to take them to pay back a loan." ■

activities she initiated while in school. They included the Taft Native Student Association and a Native American Youth Group called "New Voices."

In 2002, at Oregon State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Ethnic Studies specializing in Native Studies, she received the Frances Dancy Hooks Award, the university's diversity award for her "commitment to coalition building."

Also in 2002, the service sorority Gamma Alpha Omega Inc., Kappa Chapter, presented her with the Outstanding Pillar Award, representing her dedication to five "pillars" — honesty, integrity, leadership, scholarship and unity.

So, move the calendar forward a few years, including nearly five as Scholarship Coordinator at the

Tribal Education Division, and the awards begin again.

In March, she received the Outstanding Indian Volunteer of the Year Award for 2008 from the Oregon Indian Education Association.

Trinity Minahan, academic adviser in the Tribe's Education Division, has worked often with Whitebear, including presentations addressing the Oregon Indian Education Association.

"She puts her heart and soul into everything she does," Minahan said. "She has a unique way of integrating culture and education because she has walked and is walking in both of those worlds. So, she relates well to our students."

In April, Whitebear received the Outstanding New Professional from the Western Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators for

2007-08. This award is given each year to only one of 1,500 professionals across the eight Western states.

The list of her volunteer efforts is ongoing. She takes leadership positions with professional organizations and on her own time she advocates with her brother, Ché Butler, against schools using Indian mascots. She makes presentations on recycling and energy conservation to pre-school students. She works with Youth Education at the Youth Leadership Conference here at the Tribe.

Whitebear lives in Lincoln City with her partner, Loren Lincoln (Yuki/Northern California), and two children, Chechio, 4, and his sister, Aqiwo-xus, 1 (Chumash names meaning Grizzly Bear and Bear Star, respectively).

Among her heroes are her stepfather Dino Butler (Siletz) and family friend John Trudell (Santee Sioux), both participants and survivors of the events at the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975.

"Uncle Dino is my other dad," she said. "He helped raise me and my brother as his own, which is something my dad also expresses gratitude and respect for. He is also one of my spiritual mentors. I live a very ceremonial lifestyle and often ask his advice on this. I look up to him and respect all he has sacrificed and gives for the people."

"(Writer, poet, artist and performer) John Trudell," she said, "has influenced my writing and many of my environmental views. I grew up listening to his music and reading his poetry. I admire that he speaks the truth and isn't afraid to do so. When I need a little motivation, all I have to do is listen to some of his earlier music."

"My mom is a source of inspiration to our family. She has gone through a lot of tough situations in her life. One thing she always taught me was to take care of your family. She always puts me and my brothers first to make sure we are taken care of. ... She has shown me how to be a strong Native woman and a good mother. I'll always be grateful for that."

"On a side note," she added, "Bob Marley and Ché Guevara are also heroes of mine."

"I love hanging out with my kids," she said. She shares the Chinuk Wawa experience with her son, who is enrolled in the Tribe's Immersion Program. The family goes to Canoe Family meetings. They participate in the beach cleanup sponsored each year by the nonprofit SOLV. "We go to lots of ceremonies throughout the year," she said.

She is also, she said, "really big on the environment and eating healthy." During the interview, she sipped now and then on a health food store hot chocolate with cinnamon and ate chili.

"Chocolate and spicy foods are my favorites," she said.

Part of the lesson has sunk in for her son. When given the choice recently of ice cream or frozen blueberries, 4-year-old Chechio showed that he's been listening.

"He's all, 'You know, sometimes we have to make the healthy choice,'" Whitebear said. ■