

Essay contest seeks entries

In honor of National American Indian Heritage Month, the Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Portland General Electric are sponsoring an annual essay contest for high school and college students.

The topic is "Lighter Footprint on Mother Earth." Entries should be between 450 to 500 words and double-spaced, typed using 12-point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins. In addition, they should be well organized and use correct spelling and grammar.

Submissions should include a title page with the entrant's first and last name, contact information (phone number/address) and school level (high school/college).

Entries must be received no later than Nov. 1. They should be mailed to Bonneville Power Administration, Attn: Corrina Sutter, DKT-DITT-2, P.O. Box 491, Vancouver, WA 98666. Essays also can be faxed to Sutter at 360-418-8433 or submitted via e-mail to casutter@bpa.gov.

Essays, which will not be returned, will be judged by the Sponsor Committee and winners will be contacted in mid-November.

Six winners will be announced. At the high school level, winners will receive \$300, \$200 and \$100 for first through third place, respectively, and at the college level, winners will receive \$500, \$300 and \$100. ■

Transportation to Grand Ronde

Transportation to Grand Ronde will be on Oct. 23 for medical and dental appointments or enrollment cards. Please call Lisa Archuleta at 503-235-4230.

They will leave the Portland office at 8 a.m.
Please call in advance to reserve your seat.

Financial Wellness support group starts

The Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority is sponsoring a Financial Wellness support group that is meeting weekly at 5:30 p.m. Thursdays in the Housing Authority conference room.

The support group will discuss, share and learn ways to stretch dollars and protect the money participant's make.

The group will be informal and will decide on the topic to be discussed and researched each week. The Housing Authority has computers and worksheets to help people develop and track spending plans.

For more information, call Deborah Kroeker at 503-879-4522 or send her an e-mail at deborah.kroeker@grandronde.org. ■

Walking On...

Hubert Harry Mercier Sept. 22, 1910 – July 17, 2008

By Chris Mercier
Special to Smoke Signals

Earlier this year, Grand Ronde hosted a college-level class over spring break. I am not entirely sure what the class was called, but a large portion of the students were from Oregon State University, including their team's quarterback, at least one starting offensive lineman and some other notables. The leading scorer of the OSU mens' basketball team also was present.

I was asked to come greet them one day at the Elders' meal site, noting that as a University of Oregon graduate most of my interactions with OSU students had been yelling at them during basketball games. They thought that was funny.

All of these students seemed very interested in knowing about the Grand Ronde community, especially our Tribe. I shared a story or two with them, and eventually brought up a topic that got all their attention. It was the story of a 97-year-old man who had lived for nearly a century in this community, and more than a decade ago had spent three days in jail for punching a neighbor in the face, as well as ramming a pickup truck into that same man's car. The students laughed in amazement, and assumed that this feisty old Indian must be a local legend, long since gone.

No, I told them, he is quite alive. In fact, the man only lives about 1,000 feet away. At that time, Hubert H. Mercier was staying in the Adult Foster Care lodge, recovering from an accident in which he had nearly severed three of his fingers off with a table saw. Marcel Jones, the basketball player, asked if it would be possible to meet Hubert. I knew that my great-grandfather always loved to have an audience to regale.

While about six students haggled with their professor to miss half a lecture to meet a local legend, I called the lodge to let them know I would be coming by with visitors to visit Hubert.

The room Hubert lived in was not really made to accommodate a large group of people, especially not college-level athletes, like an offensive lineman. But somehow we made do, the eight or nine of us huddled around Hubert as he sat in his bed. I remember how suddenly small he looked while these students and student/athletes towered over him. But they greeted him with respect, though he looked frail and worn out. He looked up in surprise at OSU's starting offensive tackle, and that same player, Jeremy Perry I believe, looked down on him with silent admiration, as if greeting some old war hero. Hubert assumed Perry, who was of Polynesian descent and thus dark with big tattooed forearms, must have been descended from some local, and even asked him so. I had to explain that Perry was not Tribal, but Hawaiian. Hubert just nodded, and proceeded to tell a number of stories, some I had heard before, but one that was new. He would do that occasionally. Often one might hear the same stories told over and over, but he would throw in a new one that must have been hidden somewhere in the recesses of his memory.

After a little less than an hour, the students departed, but not without expressing some thanks to me for allowing them to meet such a memorable person. Of course, Hubert told multiple stories that involved fighting, from "Murphy" to "Boomer." The common denominator in all these fights is that at one point or another somebody either challenged or insulted him. His response was usually to deck them. Like a couple of the Oregon State athletes noted, Hubert didn't take crap from anybody. No exceptions.



Gov. Ted Kulongoski, Hubert Mercier and Chris Mercier.

When Hubert passed away on July 17 of this year, it was almost as if the impossible happened. The man who was so feisty that I and many others didn't think reaching the age of 105 or 110 was even out of the question yielded to Father Time. Most importantly, he actually went quietly and without incident in the comfort of his own home, one of a few dozen in the Grand Ronde area he had built with his own hands. Spirit Mountain, the symbol of an Indian Reservation where Hubert had spent nearly a century of life beginning in 1910, was fittingly visible just through the window of his front room.

Years ago, in 2002, while working for *Smoke Signals*, I wrote an Elders feature on Hubert. The May 1, 2002,

headline read "Fierce, Proud Man is a Local Legend." That story ended up consuming a full page and a half of space in the newspaper, but was still really just a snapshot of his life. He was born on Sept. 22 to Arthur and Agnes Mercier and had three brothers and one sister. Much like what he told that contingent of OSU students, the story was laced with tales of fighting from "Boomer" to "Murphy." But in that piece Hubert spoke of life on the Reservation, like when as a schoolboy he and some classmates tied up their teacher and beat him. Evidently one had peeked into the man's journal where he labeled the local Indian students "savages."

Hubert told me while writing that story about work. If there was anything the man was besides a fighter, he was a worker, having left home at 14 and taken part in all sorts of different forms of labor, from Highway 101 builder to logger to boat maker to gatherer of moss and chittum bark on the Reservation. For three years even, near Siletz, he was a fisherman.

Like many, Hubert had children. And grandchildren. And that group I belong to, great-grandchildren. All of us undoubtedly would have different stories to tell about him, and our own personal relationships would just as surely vary. My own with him was overall pretty pleasant. Over the last five years I would try and take him to lunch on a regular basis, usually Yvette's, and when that great place closed, Fort Hill. He liked soup, black coffee and, over the last year, could not seem to get enough shrimp.

Hubert's hearing was darn near shot over the last decade, maybe even longer. You had to practically yell to converse with him. He liked watching television, with a taste for the sillier stuff, like Jerry Springer and wrestling, and shows with fighting like boxing on ESPN Classic or the emerging mixed martial arts shows.

I learned not to discount his understanding of what was going on in the outside world, as he would ask me about the Tribe. I never met anybody in Grand Ronde who didn't know who he was. Twice Gov. Ted Kulongoski visited Hubert in his old house across from the clinic; something Hubert considered a great honor. Both times it was the governor who asked to visit Hubert, not the other way around.

You had to meet him, and listen to him, to appreciate the perspectives of a man who had seen many things in his life, a man who knew Grand Ronde long ago, when an automobile was rare and a trip to Lincoln City was a two-day adventure.

A man who knew what it was like to be mistreated simply because he was Indian, who lived through World War I, World War II, the Great Depression, Korea, Termination, Vietnam, Restoration, the birth of Spirit Mountain Casino and the table saw incident, which will undoubtedly go on to become a part of the Hubert Mercier legacy.