

Artistic sensibilities

Spirit Mountain Community Fund supports Oregon College of Art and Craft

Editor's note: This is the 10th in a monthly series of stories in 2008 by *Smoke Signals* that showcase the real-life effects of Spirit Mountain Community Fund donations. Since its inception in 1997, the Community Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, has donated more than \$40 million to groups in 11 western Oregon counties. These stories focus on the good work those generous Tribal dollars do within nearby communities and the effect they have on people and programs.

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

A person might turn to art and craft to "make an individual statement," says Oregon College of Art and Craft President Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson, or like many Native American artists, they might be "finding a traditional way to make something."

"It does not always have to be something new," she says.

Oregon College of Art and Craft in Portland is an accredited four-year college with a community focused, continuing education component serving teenagers to seniors. Its Journeys in Creativity teen program targets Native American youth (see "Youth participate in camp" in the Oct. 1 *Smoke Signals*), who receive full scholarships to participate.

"Our goal," Laing-Malcolmson says, "is to offer a potential certificate or BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) degree in Native Studies."

Spirit Mountain Community Fund began supporting a similar program at the college in 2004. Art Adventures Outreach provides opportunities for "economically disadvantaged" youth that in previous years served students as young as 3 all the way to 18. Today, the program serves youth aged 15-18. Twenty percent of Art Adventures students receive 100 percent scholarships.

With a campus for 1,000 now serving 2,200, the college started a \$30 million capital campaign — *Craft Lives Here* — that will increase teaching, studio and public spaces from 42,000 to 54,000 square feet.

In May, Spirit Mountain Community Fund contributed \$75,000 toward the capital campaign. Since 2003, the Community Fund has contributed \$116,225 in four grants to the college.

Architect Charles Rose, Laing-Malcolmson says, "has designed other art institutions, some colleges and an art museum. He had good ideas about lighting and the kind of space we needed."

The first of three phases of the expansion includes a new building for drawing, painting and photography that takes advantage of natural light. Studios will be square to accommodate students working around a center of attention, like a model. And the part of the building planned to be below

ground level will house photography darkrooms.

If darkroom photography sounds a little old fashioned in today's digital world, consider that the school also goes back to the 19th century to teach about daguerreotypes, an early photographic process.

"We teach students to use some of the processes photography was founded on," Laing-Malcolmson says. "We still teach them the zone system," devised in the mid-20th century to produce black-and-white photographs with sections of full white and full black, and a wide range of grays in between.

"To be able to do any strong digital work," says Ariane Dixon, "you have to have an understanding of how silver halide actually works, and how an image forms. This background is so important."

Dixon is a 2005 graduate of the post-baccalaureate program at Oregon College of Art and Craft, and now works as the college's special events coordinator.

The post-baccalaureate degree is between the Bachelor of Arts degree that she received from at the University of Oregon in 2002, where she studied photojournalism, and a Master of Fine Arts degree, also available at Oregon College of Art and Craft.

One of the most important features of the new building, Laing-Malcolmson says, is that the design allows "a lot of space to show work and also to hang out. We think it's important for artists to talk to each other, to learn from looking and talking."

This first building to come out of the current capital campaign is scheduled for completion next August in time for the 2009-10 school year.

All the way through, the design has fostered a sense of community on this campus known as a "College in a Garden."

The college's three-part master plan includes setting aside funds for increasing the school's endowment for building maintenance and scholarship funds.

"It was probably two of the hardest years in my life," Dixon says about attending the college. "I learned more about myself. The expectations of the faculty are so high that I was constantly working. It was overwhelming but beautiful. I completely devoted myself to the work. It's expected



Photo by Stickeen Design and Photography

In May, the Spirit Mountain Community Fund contributed \$75,000 to the Oregon College of Art and Craft \$30 million capital campaign, *Craft Lives Here*. A new drawing, painting and photography building will be completed in this capital campaign.

of all the students."

She learned "what I was capable of," she says. "Photojournalism is about the subject, but here, you go deep into yourself. I learned to communicate better."

"They expect us to leave here and work in the arts, someday."

Shirod Younker (Miluk-Coos/Coquille) runs the A. Susana Santos Journeys in Creativity Teen Program focusing on Tribal people. He started doing bronze casting at Oregon State University, and he does "a lot of woodworking and printmaking today."

"My personal goal is to really be able to offer something unique to Tribal people, to help perpetuate Tribal craft."

The goal of the Journeys program, he says, is "to help youth who have an interest in art and are looking for a future in art. We really give them a hands-on, very intense, two-week camp where they are living and breathing art and hopefully learning new skills

to use and also learning what makes their Tribal art unique to themselves."

The Museum at Warm Springs and the Tribe's Kah-Nee-Ta Resort worked with the college to start this program, which is named for Warm Springs Tribal member and college graduate A. Susana Santos.

Last summer's program accommodated 15 teenagers, including two from Grand Ronde and three from the Maoris of New Zealand.

Commenting on the similarity between Maori and Grand Ronde designs, Laing-Malcolmson said, "Both were water peoples, and when you look at these patterns and designs, they come from their environment."

When the forerunners of today's Maori and Grand Ronde peoples looked at the water, she said, they may have seen similar designs.

"People are inspired by their environment. There is a river," she says, "that connects us all." ■