

25th Restoration commemorative issue



Dean Mercier

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they started understanding."



Mychal remembers making her Lown regalia at the age of 18.

"That's when the culture really came in," says Candy, "when they started making Regalia."

Tribal Elder Dean Mercier came on an interim Tribal Council as vice chairman in the wake of Restoration, late in 1983. Like many others, he had moved out of the area because work in Grand Ronde had evaporated after Termination. Back he came to serve the Tribe.

Dean Mercier was among the community rainmakers, bringing Elders and the community fish, deer and elk during the lean years after Termination. He also was known around town and beyond for his antics.

After Restoration, the Tribe drafted a Constitution that was approved in November 1984, and the Tribe had two years from the date of Restoration to develop a Reservation Plan, which was finished in November 1985.

Following the advice of Oregon Legal Service's Native American Program, the Tribe went after lands owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Among those lands was property of the bankrupt Oregon & California Railroad Company (ONC), but, "They said that the railroad land was privately controlled and off limits to the Tribe," recalls Kathryn Harrison.

"Dean told them they could make it public domain land, and give it to us," Kathryn says.

Kathryn, who was chair of the Early Tribal Council, credits Dean Mercier's tenacity and unexpected bluntness for the Tribe gaining more land in the Restoration process than the federal government initially had intended to give.

"By God, you better give me 10 good reasons why we can't have that land!" Harrison remembers Dean saying. "And in the end, we got what we asked for."

Success in getting the reservation land restored had a special meaning for the Tribe, says Mark Mercier, who served on Tribal Council for 15 years starting in 1984. For the last 12 years, until 1996, he was chair-

man. "The timber land would give the Tribe discretion over income generated from timber sales," he says. Federal funds for health care and housing had all kinds of strings attached.

For Mark, the return of that land to the

Tribe is his strongest memory from the Restoration period. He had hunted and fished and grew up on this land.

"It took almost four years before the Reservation plan was signed into public law," he says. He remembers sending three copies of the plan to Washington, D.C. Each time, a bureaucrat in the agency called to say that the plan had not arrived.

"What the hell are they doing with those plans?" Mark remembers another Tribal member saying. "Eating them?"

"I told the Tribal Council that we had sent them close to a dozen of those things," Mark recalls. "I'm going out there to make sure they're alive and breathing."

This time, he personally delivered the copies, marking down the time and date, and the person who received them.

Once the Tribe got the timber land, some members on the council said, "Let's set up a rainy-day fund or an endowment fund, in case the timber ever goes bad." We could keep the crucial programs going," Mark says.



In the wake of Restoration, the Tribe has grown. From 862 members at Termination, from 1,101 on the Restoration rolls, the Tribe now has more than 5,100 members, most who joined after the hard work of Restoration was completed. But many of their contributions have been significant as well.

"Restoration has allowed me to give back," says Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker, 46, who grew up in Portland. "One of my dreams was to get an education, raise my children here and give back to the Tribe.

It's important for me to have my grandchildren here."

Pat Mercier, married to and divorced from Tribal member Bryce Mercier, began working for the Tribe as finance

manager in 1989. She helped set up trust funds for Tribal members' many needs.

"She worked a lot of late nights," says her son, Bryan, now 34. "Chris and I would make our own macaroni and cheese." Bryan came home this year, he says, to give back to the Tribe.

Tribal members Bryan and Chris originally came to the Tribe almost as "strangers." The brothers count Tribal Natural Resources' youth crew summer work as their first jobs.

"We didn't know anybody, but everybody knew us, it seemed," Bryan says. "We were either 'Winston's grandkids' or 'Bryce's boys.' I was just blown away by how they were offering their friendship."

"It was kind of like coming to the edge of the world because growing up in Salem is where we spent most of our youth. Coming out to the country seemed like it was in the middle of nowhere," says Tribal Council member Chris Mercier, now 33.

They remember their first Tribal Council meetings.

"They were pretty contentious. There were shoving matches and almost fist fights and stuff. At the time, that was part of the characters on Council," Bryan says. "They didn't worry about what they said, and that's good and bad. We miss a little bit of the salt-of-the-earthness, because they knew what was right and they stood up for it."

"What's interesting," Chris says, "is that we were raised by the non-Tribal half of our family, but we were always involved. The Tribal community is more than just Tribal members. Mom is proof of that. This is what I've learned: Once you start caring, you can't not care."

Bryan was the Tribe's 2003 Hatfield Fellow who afterward also represented Tribal interests for federal agencies in Washington, D.C. Chris is now serving his second term on the Tribal Council, and before that was an award-winning staff writer for *Smoke Signals*.

"What the Tribe has done," Chris says, "is help a lot of people improve their lives. The Tribe is always going to thrive. It will always provide a lot of core services. The challenge that I see is what's going to happen to Indian gaming? Unless we diversify, we're going to be at the mercy of whatever happens to

Indian gaming nationally. I think we're always going to thrive, but there are some challenges that we are going to have to deal with, and I think we'll find a way to deal with them."

"The future for Grand Ronde is in flux for now. I'm convinced that Indian gaming is not going to be a long-term, sustainable model for the community," Bryan says from his experience at the federal level that included traveling to Tribes across the country.

"It's been a window of opportunity for us to benefit from, and we've been very smart by funding endowments to provide future revenues from there, but still, the community that we've been developing with housing and all these other services have brought people back."



The Sell family left Grand Ronde when Tribal Council member June Sell (now Sell-Sherer) was 12. They lived in Kennewick, Wash., until 1995 when she returned to Grand Ronde to give back with a run for Tribal Council. In 1999, June won her first term on Tribal Council, and has served on the Council in many years since.

"It's the being able to bring our people together and share blessings and to have a common bond" that she remembers about Restoration.

"There were a lot of family gatherings; we had our own little mini-powwows and stick games. I remember the eels."

"I remember the land where the casino is now," says Candy Robertson. "We said, 'Well, this would be a good spot (for the casino).' It's all so amazing how it grew."

"I remember for the longest time when my grandparents (Abe and Mildred Holmes) lived here," says Tribal member Jim Holmes. "We'd come over every Sunday for dinner and I remember just coming through by where the casino is now, and there was nothing there. Scattered homes. It was almost barren. How much it has changed and how much economic development has been created. I know it's something dad was proud of."

"It was a fight every day," says Kathryn Harrison, "and I wouldn't trade it for nothing."

Tribal Elders Margaret Provost, Marvin Kimsey and Merle Holmes actively pursued Restoration from the beginning. Their reputation became "the housewife and two truck drivers that passed a bill in Congress."

"And our education was nil," Margaret Provost says.

But their persistence was infinite. ■



June Sell-Sherer



Bryan Mercier

Chris Mercier