

Grand Ronde Tribal member hired as head archivist of Native American museum

O'Neal says new job is a 'perfect fit' for her heritage, interest in history

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Tribal member Jennifer O'Neal is in the envious position of saying without reservation that her new job is a "perfect fit."

Considering her interest in history and Native American heritage, she couldn't be happier.

O'Neal, 31, became head archivist in July at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Md.

"It's a perfect fit for what my lifelong career goal has been, which is to work with Native American archives and see them handled accordingly, and ensure they are being cared for," O'Neal says in a telephone interview.

"I'm loving every minute of it. It's just a great, great environment to work in. Right now, I'm right where I want to be and where I want to continue my career."

Being hired by the National Museum of the American Indian is the culmination of 13 years of hard work for O'Neal since graduating from a small Wyoming high school (Lyman) in 1995 and complements her deep interest in history, be it world, American or Native American.

"I have always been very interested in history ever since I was in high school," O'Neal says. "I had a very instrumental high school teacher who was one of my mentors, particularly in American history, and I also had influential professors in college concerning American West history and Native American history. ...

"I was lucky enough to go to very good schools and have very good teachers. I always knew I wanted to do something in history, or law, or some form of humanities."

O'Neal received the Grand Ronde Tribe's Eula Petite Scholarship and earned her undergraduate degree in History and a teaching certificate at Utah State University.

Later, she also earned a master's degree in History from Utah State.

She then earned a master's degree in Library Science from the University of Arizona in Tucson, where she participated in the Knowledge River Program designed for Native American and Hispanic students.

"I actually found out about that program through *Smoke Signals*," she says.

She is currently working on a Ph.D in History from Georgetown

University.

O'Neal said she became interested in archival work while participating in an internship at Utah State University while earning her master's degree.

"It was just a perfect fit of blending history and working with archival collections," she says. "You get to find out different things about so many different aspects of history working with the collections and working with the donors. I just loved everything about it."

As head archivist at the National Museum of the American Indian, O'Neal oversees the Archives Unit, which includes approximately 324,000 images, 1,500 linear feet of records and more than 12,000 videotapes, motion pictures and audio recordings.

O'Neal not only handles administrative and supervisory duties, but also oversees the processing of collections, reference questions and the Research Room.

Before that, she was the first archivist at the U.S. Department of State's Office of Treaty Affairs in Washington, D.C., and held archival positions at Princeton University and the University of Arizona.

Professionally, she is a founding member of the Society of American Archivists' Native American Archives Roundtable. She also participated in an international gathering in Flagstaff, Ariz., in April 2006 that drafted the best practices for the culturally responsive care and use of Native American archival materials, which produced the document "Protocols for Native American Archival Materials."

"While serving in various positions, I've been very involved with Native American archives and the issues surrounding them because that is very important to me," O'Neal says.

The international gathering in Flagstaff included archivists, historians and archaeologists.

"At that time, there was no real guidance on how to handle these specific items and what archivists should be doing or not doing," O'Neal says.

"In many instances, nonTribal



Photo by R.A. Whiteside, NMAI

Jennifer O'Neal

repositories holding Native American materials are often handled by nonNatives or have been donated without an individual's or Tribe's knowledge, so the protocols were drafted to create best practices on how to care for these items and to create collaborative relationships between the repositories and Tribes. The protocols are meant to inspire and foster mutual respect and reciprocity."

O'Neal says the most interesting thing about her new position is seeing the field notes of archaeologists and anthropologists who visited Native American Tribes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

"We have the collection of materials that were originally part of the predecessor to this museum, which was the Museum of the American Indian in New York," she says.

"What's fascinating about that

collection are the details it has. The records of all the expeditions that were done for the museum. George Gustav Heye sent all of his anthropologists and archaeologists to various parts of the United States, South America, Canada, the Northwest Territories. We have many of the field notes from all the expeditions that were done.

"It's fascinating to see those notes, drawings and details because these archival materials relate specifically to the object collection. ... It sheds light on those objects and gives meaning to them. Moreover, they can provide Native language and customs that may have previously thought to be lost."

O'Neal says being the head archivist is very important to her as a Native American. She is descended from the Shasta, Cow Creek and Chinook Tribes.

"It has helped me realize how important this work is, not only just to Native Americans in general, but to Grand Ronde's history as well," she says. "I know how important it is to preserve our history for not only the current time, but for future generations."

"We need to document and tell our history, not only in an archival way, such as through written documents, but also through oral history and then making sure we tell our history from generation to generation. It's so easy to lose it. I know preserving our history and preserving our way of life is so important to ensuring that our legacies and traditions go on."

"That's why archives, photos and recordings are so important is because they help to tell our story, and if we do it, it helps to tell the story the way we want to tell it. It's a way to right the wrongs that have been done to Native Americans throughout history."

O'Neal is the daughter of Al and Tribal Elder Marta (Parazoo) Clifford of Springfield and Ron and Sue O'Neal of Bend. ■

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. ■

New!

Home Energy Efficiency Program

The Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority's new TEEPEI program provides energy education services, and funding for home energy saving projects, and home energy-generation projects

Enrolled Tribal members living in Polk, Yamhill, Marion, Multnomah, Tillamook and Washington counties may apply for the energy project funding.

All Tribal members are eligible for the free Energy Saving Kit, available soon!

If you are interested in:

- Making your home more energy efficient
- Lowering your monthly utility costs
- Replacing appliances with energy efficient ones
- Using alternative sources of energy to heat and cool your home

Then we want to hear from you!

To receive an application packet, and learn more, please us at (800) 422-0232, x 2445.