

'Native people in college have a different focus'

LEWIS continued
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When not in school, Lewis kept change in his pocket working at a never-ending series of restaurants.

"I worked about 16 years in restaurants in California and Oregon," he says. "I did everything from pizza cook, dishwashing, waiting tables and manager."

Lewis began biking as a teenager in Salem. He used to ride on long trips out in the country east the city.

"I continued bike riding in California. I rode mountain bikes," he says, "and I did a lot of road riding and entered some races."

"At end of school, I decided I wanted to come back to Oregon. The Tribe was doing pretty good and I had an interest in working for the Tribe. The best way, I figured, was to go to school in Oregon."

He returned, re-established residency and applied to the University of Oregon and Oregon State University. Accepted both places, his choice was not that difficult.

"U of O had a better reputation for liberal education," he says, "and a better reputation for cycling."

"I used to cycle 60 miles at a time. I'd cycle the California coast. I'd cycle through the Valley of the Moon, where Jack London made his house."

And when he came back to Oregon, Lewis cycled in the rain comfortably, he says.

At the University of Oregon, Lewis earned a bachelor's degree in humanities in 1997, but has been involved with anthropology from the beginning.

His path took him to New Zealand, Australia and Fiji in 1997, where he met with Maori and Arernte people.

"I saw how they were working to restore their own cultures and their own sovereign presence in the land," he says. "I thought that maybe we could do that here."

Visiting and talking, he saw how they strategize. In New Zealand, all Tribes were covered under one treaty and they worked together to restore their sovereignty.

"I thought we could do something here in Oregon to restore our sovereignty and thought it best to work domestically," he says. "It was fun and exciting in New Zealand, but we needed to do the same work here in Oregon."

"Tribal Council now has policies for restoring our presence in our ceded lands. We have many projects now approved by council to create interpretive signs, pamphlets and write history for the Tribe. We also have formed partnerships with outside organizations, which will be a long time building on itself to restore our presence."

In the United States and Oregon, Tribes were not considered under one unified treaty.

"It means we're not always united," Lewis says. "We all have our own interests. We're not united in language either. We have different cultures. Tribes here were not always on the friendliest terms with



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal member and the Tribe's Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis is close to completing his doctorate degree in philosophy with a specialization in anthropology from the University of Oregon. He has three months to edit his 500-page dissertation, "The Termination of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde of Oregon," to 300 pages.

one another. We always had trade and political relationships, and we are still doing that. It does have an effect on our power. If we were able to unite under one cause, we would have more power."

Back home in 1998, Lewis became involved in the Southwest Oregon Research Project.

"I went back to D.C. with Native American researchers and brought back much information." He made copies for all the Tribes in Oregon.

"It made me a very good researcher," he says. "It helped introduce me to all the Tribes and concepts about Oregon Indians. I read these early anthropological documents and became familiar with all that research. This work went on through 2006."

For his master's degree, which he earned in 2000, he wrote a National Register of Historic Places Cultural Resource nomination for Indian Beach, an area in northern California on the Tolowa Smith River Rancheria (reservation). The site is where the Tolowa set up temporary camps for three weeks during the summer and fish for and dry smelt. The nomination provides "some recognition and some protection of cultural resources" for the Rancheria.

Though he has always had a special interest in the Grand Ronde Tribe, he knew Loren Bommelyn, then chair of the Tolowa, and took advantage of the opportunity.

There also was another reason to look in other directions.

"In anthropology," Lewis says, "it pays to spread out your studies so you get a lot of experience working with different people. When you're preparing for your career, it's really good to show you have experience in different environments."

As early as 1994, when Lewis began undergraduate humanities studies at the University of Oregon, he realized that all of the humanities were based on European models.

"There was no consideration

for Natives having their own creations," he says.

"I noticed that Native people were relegated to anthropology. Everybody else had a literary culture, and I began to question that. Why isn't Native literature a study of the humanities as well? You could make that argument. If you wanted to fight that fight, you could win it, too."

"I actually studied Native peoples anyway. For my BA, I studied colonization and applied all that to the history of colonization, to Native peoples being colonized. I made that argument and had to petition it, and I won. I got the BA even though I didn't study western civilization."

In the winter of 2001, Lewis started working on his doctorate. He found unique classes in international studies that allowed him to study Native peoples and apply it to anthropology.

"I think I realized early on that Native people in college have a different focus," he says. "We're there for our people first, and then to make a personal career. Community comes first."

"I also realized there wasn't anybody that could really advise me on the studies that I was doing on Native American culture, so I had to access advisers sometimes outside of the university."

He named Tribal Elders from Grand Ronde's Culture Committee, Don Day, Pat Allen and current Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, and from other Tribes he called on Robert Kennta (Siletz) and Malissa Minthorn (Umatilla).

"I was able to form this network of advisers," he says. "They gave me support. Just the idea that they support whatever I do, that I'm doing a good thing on behalf of the Tribe and I have their support. That's always been the biggest thing that students need, that people care about what they are doing and they're being supported by their Elders."

"I knew he was working on his

Ph.D.," says Kennedy, "and I thought, 'Here's a young man that is so interested in his people that he's chosen a career to encourage all members to increase their pride in who they are and where they come from.' That was just overwhelming to me."

"I made a personal commitment, though I never told anyone, that I would encourage him as much as I could to let others know of this young man who is one of our warriors, and that he is so valued."

For his doctorate, Lewis says, "I originally wanted to do something that was important to Oregon Tribes and something that would be helpful. Maybe study the education of the Tribes."

But education turned to assimilation, and he realized that there was a more powerful event in mid-century that "affected our assimilation greatly and that it had never been studied very well. I realized that the best thing I could do was fully document the Termination of the Tribe."

Lewis is now passing on the mentorship he received from Tribal Elders to the next generation. He has worked with Tribal member Jennifer O'Neal at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., to bring more Grand Ronde Tribal members into its programs.

In previous stories, Lewis' work with Tribal member Stephanie Wood has been documented. Just this week, he learned that Wood has been accepted as an intern at the museum.

"This doctorate has been a kind of extra job that I've had to do," he says. "I'd like to get this out of the way, so I can move on and do my first job better, put more time into it, more effort into it, and also pursue different writing and research projects."

Among projects he has in mind, he's considering a biography of Francis Mercier, "the Belgian man who brought the Mercier name to Grand Ronde. He is my great-great-grandfather."

"There's work that needs to be done researching the treaties, and when the individual Tribes moved to Grand Ronde," he says.

Although many came with the Trail of Tears, the Tillamooks arrived in the 1870s, and the Chinooks and Kalapuyas around 1856.

"I would like at some point to teach more, possibly out here, too. Maybe through Chemeketa, a class where people write their own histories."

As for becoming a doctor, Lewis says, "I'm not really able to think about it. In three months, I have to chop 200 pages from the paper. It's a daunting task."

Once completed, however, Lewis said that copies of the dissertation will be made available to Tribal members.

He is thankful to many, including those on Tribal Council and those staffing the Education Division.

"Without the efforts of (Tribal member) Marion Mercier, who was Education manager for most of my time at U of O, I may never have finished," Lewis says. ■