

Tribal member blooms where he is planted

Foster turns WEX experience into full-time nursery job

By Siobhan Taylor
Public Affairs director

Every day is busy at Portland Nursery Co., but on weekends the place is really hopping.

The radios strapped to employees' hips are buzzing with requests.

The name that comes up most frequently on those radios is "Kenny."

"Kenny can you meet a customer at the loading dock?" "Kenny can you move the pallets in the back lot?"

And the voice responding is always cheerful and positive. "Will do!" or "Already there."

That's Kenny as in Tribal member Kenneth E. Foster and the most recent success story of the Tribe's Vocational Rehabilitation Work Experience Program.

Months ago, Foster came to the program looking for experience in a field that interested him. He knew he wanted to work outdoors and was interested in nature and plants. That's where the Vocational Rehabilitation staff in the Portland office entered the picture.

Tribal member Jon George and Chris Garcia worked to find an employer willing to provide Foster the needed work experience.

"It's all about overcoming barriers to employment" George said. "We worked with Kenneth to narrow

his career interest, and then we lined up his Work Experience Program, WEX for short."

After Portland Nursery agreed to take on Foster, an interview was set. Then an agreement was signed between the Vocational Rehabilitation program staff, the nursery staff and Foster.

Tribal member and 477 Employment & Training and Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor Patsy Pullin oversees the program and was kept apprised of the process. After all the paperwork was signed, Foster began his three-month experience.

Foster radiates energy as he describes his interest in the nursery business, his appreciation for his work supervisors and his love of working in the outdoors.

"I'm also in great shape from all of this running around," he said with a laugh.



Photo by Siobhan Taylor

Tribal member Kenny Foster, a product of the Tribe's Vocational Rehabilitation Work Experience Program, works at Portland Nursery.

During Foster's participation in the program, George and Garcia met monthly with him and with his supervisors at the nursery to track progress and address any concerns that might have cropped up. Within

weeks Foster's name was on everyone's lips. He was acknowledged with full-time employees when special bonuses were awarded.

But to Foster, 33, the biggest bonus was the opportunity given to him and the mentoring he received from Portland Nursery staff.

"I really want to thank Suzy Hancock, Ken Whitten and Jimmy Mack and the rest of the Portland Nursery staff for their kindness and support while I learned the nursery business. They are really good to me," he said.

And he also gives a special note of thanks to his friend and neighbor, Claudia Carson, who encouraged and prodded him every step of the way.

"I couldn't have done it without her support," he said. "She's always making me want to better myself and see my potential."

Foster's employers realized his potential as well. When the program came to an end recently, they extended a full-time employment offer to him and he eagerly accepted.

"Kenneth did a great job during his WEX at Portland Nursery," said George. "We also want to extend our gratitude to the entire Portland Nursery staff for their added support and training skills. They gave Kenneth a wonderful opportunity. We are so proud of Kenneth. He has shown all of us what the WEX program can accomplish." ■

2009 Food Preservation Classes

Grand Ronde Community Resource Center's Garden House

(Next to Community Garden)

10 A.M. – 2 P.M.

Sept. 12 – Salsa (tomato & tomatillo salsa) (opt. pineapple salsa)

Sept. 26 – Blueberries (jam & pie filling) (opt. syrup)

Oct. 10 – Pears (butter, canned & dehydrated)

Oct. 17 – Apples (butter, pie filling & dehydrated)

Optional Classes (need minimum of 2 people signed up before scheduling)

Meat – chicken, beef, pork, game (if available)

Fish – Salmon, tuna

Sausage making-Italian, summer, breakfast, chorizo

Cheese/yogurt making

Bread making – sourdough, artisan, potato

Everything is provided, however, feel free to bring any fruit/berries, vegetables or jars that you would like to use

Lunch will be provided

Classes are limited to those individuals who meet USDA Commodity income eligibility i.e. receive Food Stamps or food boxes.

SIGN ME UP! Please contact GRCRC staff - Patrice or Angie at 503-879-5731 to sign up for classes.

