

Four Tribal members graduate in 'Feather Celebration'

Tribal member Justin Martin tells them: 'Find something you enjoy and be ready for opportunity'

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Tribal member Justin Martin, one of two keynote speakers at the June 1 Salem-Keizer Indian Education "Feather Celebration," described his own lackluster high school experience.

"I remember my graduation. It was pretty close, nip and tuck, to get through," Martin said. "I had less than a 2.0 average. It took me years of maturing afterwards."

Today, Martin looks back at a career that started as a professional ballplayer with a California Angels farm team.

"I learned how to get along with all kinds of people as a ballplayer," he said.

Though the writing was soon on the wall that he was not destined for a career in professional baseball, the team offered its players a college scholarship. Martin took advantage of it for an education in public policy.

Although the Grand Ronde Tribe remained unrecognized for much of his childhood, by the time he started specializing in public policy, the Tribe had been restored and was building a government of its own.

It wasn't long after that the Tribe offered him a position representing their interests at the state Legislature in Salem.

He has since earned a master's degree in public policy from Harvard University and represents many other clients before the state Legislature.

From the perspective of time, he saw how being ready for opportunity made all the difference in his career.

"Opportunities presented themselves and I was able to take advantage," he said. "Find something you enjoy doing and get ready for opportunity."

"This (graduation) is a big deal and you should celebrate."

Forty-three who benefited from the federally sponsored Salem-Keizer Indian Education Program (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) successfully completed the requirements for graduation on June 1.

Of those 43, 27 were expected to attend and 14 actually followed the Grand Ronde Honor Guard down the aisle. Of four Grand Ronde Tribal members who completed requirements for graduation, only Zachary Hesketh, who attended North High School, participated in the iconic walk.

"It was awesome," he said afterwards, surrounded by his grandparents, Ken and Lorraine Hesketh,



Tribal member Justin Martin was one of two keynote speakers at the Indian Education Program's 2010 Graduation Celebration at North Salem High School.

and parents Marcy and Jeff Davis, seven family members in all. He showed his class ring with a Viking, the school mascot, prominent. And he showed a plaque of the Indian Ten Commandments that his parents gave him as a present.

The first commandment said, "The Earth is our mother, care for her." The last said, "Enjoy life's journey but leave no tracks."

Hesketh is autistic and has three more years of continuing education ahead, where he will learn independent living skills, said his mother, Marcy.

Hesketh recalled special ed classes on the environment, art and physical education. He was a runner on the Special Olympics track team. His favorite, however, was the wellness program, with its emphasis on avoiding alcohol and illicit drugs.

"I wish they had something like that when I was a kid," said Tribal Council Secretary Kathleen Tom, aunt to keynoter Justin Martin.

Though Martin attended McKay High School in Salem, Tom and many of her relatives attended North.

"It's really nice that Salem-Keizer reaches out to Native Americans. It would be nice to expand it. It's especially important to educate the schools about our ceded lands, about Termination, all the things that happened to the Tribes," Tom

Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal member Zachary Hesketh looks at a plaque of the Native American Ten Commandments that was given to him by his grandparents Judy and Howard Davis, left and second from left respectively, after the Indian Education Program's 2010 Graduation Celebration at North Salem High School in Salem on Tuesday, June 1. Also looking at the plaque, second from right, is Marcy Davis (Siletz), Hesketh's mother.

said. "But today, it's very exciting to be back in my old school."

Other Grand Ronde Tribal graduates from the Salem-Keizer School District this year were Kyle Lewis, Samantha Shandy and Lela Williams.

Lewis and Shandy attended Sprague High School and Williams attended South High School.

West Coast Boyz, from the Con-

federated Tribes of Siletz Indians, performed the Honor Song, and their ranks included Grand Ronde Tribal member Halona Butler, who also serves in Grand Ronde Royalty.

The Indian Education program has experienced a lot of progress, said Tribal member Shelby Olson Rogers, head of the district's program since 2004, though the percentage of Native American students who graduate in four years remains below 50 percent.

According to a report in the Salem Statesman-Journal, 69 percent of white students in the district graduated in four years, compared with 52 percent of Hispanic students, 47 percent of Native American students and 45 percent of African American students.

There is, however, another factor to bear in mind when considering how many students graduate, said Olson.

"Second-year seniors do not make it into the graduation statistics, yet they still stay in school and earn their diploma. Others earn their GED. The high school completion rate for students in the Salem-Keizer's Indian Education Program is up to 64 percent and the senior dropout rate has been cut in half, to 20 percent last year," Rogers said.

The program provides in-class tutoring, literacy nights, credit recovery, assistance in determining alternative education settings, college and scholarship information, summer school, monthly parent meetings, a bi-monthly newsletter, advocates to assist parents with meetings at school, and the Native-based graduation celebration.

"Many have worked hard to finish just to get their feather," said Rogers.

Honor Guard leader Wayne Chulet (Tlinglet) presented Eagle feathers to the graduates. ■

Transportation to Grand Ronde

The Portland satellite office has a transportation day to Grand Ronde once a month for medical or dental appointments or enrollment cards. A minimum of three people must sign up. Call Lisa Archuleta at 503-235-4230. You must be an enrolled Grand Ronde Tribal member. The vehicle will leave the Portland office at 8 a.m. Please call in advance for the scheduled monthly date. ■

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