

## Lewis expands gift giving to Tribal foster children

By Ron Karten

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

Last year, Tribal member Ann Lewis and her husband nixed gifts for each other and instead bought gifts for the Tribe's foster children.

This year, she said, she secretly got her husband a Christmas present, but expanded the largesse to Tribal children by asking all the folks attending her Dec. 8 birthday party to bring gifts.

This year, the gifts all went to "prevention families," said Tribal member Carmen Mercier, Prevention caseworker for the Tribe. She referred to families that are still together, but at risk of needing foster parent intervention for the children.

"We work with Prevention to keep the kids in their homes," Mercier said.

Mercier has 12 families on her caseload and those families have 20 children, she added.

"A big special thank you to the Lewis family," said Mercier as Lewis and volunteers unloaded five big bags from the back of her SUV. "There's a gift here for every child."

Strictly speaking, the number of gifts given and children served did not grow this year, but the idea of opening up the birthday party to a larger public means that in the future the number of givers and the number of gifts have a chance to grow.

"Whatever we can do to get more people involved," said Lewis. "When I started the program last year, the Tribe had 70 kids in foster care. There are 120 in the program this year."

Lewis's birthday party was held at a winery in downtown McMinville, and attendees included Tribal Council Secretary Kathleen Tom and Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg, Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, Member Services Specialist Reina Nelson, Rebecca Crocker, Jan Reibach Sr. and Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach.

Crocker and Reibach Sr. are Tribal Elders; Nelson is a member of the Tribe, as is Looking Wolf, who also manages the Tribe's real estate portfolio. Looking Wolf also is an award-winning musician, who played at the party.

Catering and interior design specialist Kathy Sohler, Lewis' friend,



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Ann Lewis, Tribal member and the Tribe's realty specialist, drops off Christmas presents to the Tribe's Social Services Department at the Tribal Community Center on Thursday, Dec. 16. The presents went to "prevention families," families that are still together but at risk of needing foster parent intervention for the children, within the Tribe.

contributed food and decorations for the party.

In addition to partygoers, other contributors included Portland-

area Tribal Elder Joyce Ham, as well as Tribal Elder Leroy Good and his wife, Mary Ellen, from Michigan. ■

## New Year offers chance to passionately follow our bliss

*In an effort to inform and assist the community at large, Smoke Signals has agreed to publish an occasional article addressing various mental health issues written by a member of the Behavioral Health Department at Health & Wellness. We welcome letters, e-mails and questions from people with mental health-related questions at tom.bender@grandronde.org.*

By Tom Bender

*Tribal Mental Health counselor*

What do you have in your life that you feel passionate about?

Many parents will say their children, so let's rule them out. Ditto for your current relationship.

Now what are you passionate about? How do you feed your spirit?

If we are dependent on others for the state of our happiness, what happens if/when the other person leaves or displeases us somehow? Have we given up the power to make ourselves happy?

The New Age credo says, "I create my own reality." The words may sound a little cheesy, but they're true. Taking full responsibility for composing the song that is our lives is a radical step. We are 100 percent responsible for creating our reality — positive, negative and neutral.

Granted, few of us wish to take ownership for the more challenging moments in our lives and would rather chalk those up to fate, luck or someone else's fault. However, if we take the time to reflect on how we created our reality, we discover that many of the decisions we made in the past led us exactly to the circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

The good news is, there is an antidote to help us ward off habitual negative patterns and cycling in and out of unfulfilling relationships; an antidote to counteract the tendency we may have in settling for "good enough" in our lives; an antidote to feeling bored, depressed and unchallenged.

Joseph Campbell incited us to "Follow Our Bliss." Instead of waiting for good fortune to strike, what if good fortune is a choice, an energy we can invite into our lives like a welcomed houseguest.

I see finding our passion as a two-step process. The first is to commit ourselves to taking responsibility for our lives, no matter how tempting it is to divert the blame to an external source. The choice is always there to blame others for our lot in life. (Much of the world already does this.) But as long as we try to make our struggles someone else's responsibility, we are living in a state of disempowerment. If we are willing to shift the focus back to ourselves, we can then become the masters of our own lives.

The second step toward renewing our passion is to discover (or uncover) that which you feel passionate about. What gives you pleasure? What childhood dreams did you put down because they weren't "realistic"? What goals haven't you pursued because it required too much effort or discipline?

To be human means we are here to experience life and to love. Herrick wrote, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

When I reflect back on the past decade, it seems like an eye blink ago that the wheels of the calendar spun to 2-0-0-0. Life is fleeting and fragile, and a New Year is upon us. Let us resolve today to choose one thing — just one — and follow our bliss. Life is so much more fun that way. ■

## Pallets of gifts



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Spirit Mountain Casino Chief Operating Officer Randy Dugger, left, and Chief Executive Officer Rodney Ferguson look through toys that were part of the more than 12,000 toys delivered to Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland on Monday, Dec. 20. The toys were collected during the casino's annual toy drive, which encouraged casino guests to bring in new, unwrapped toys in exchange for free slot play over a three-week period. This is the third year of the toy drive and the biggest collection yet.



People, including Spirit Mountain Casino Chief Executive Officer Rodney Ferguson, second from left, and Marketing Manager Greg Fritz, third from left, watch as boxes of toys are unloaded from a semi-truck at Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland on Monday, Dec. 20. Two trucks were needed to deliver 254 boxes of toys.