

District christens school Kalapuya Elementary

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Tom Douglas, an art teacher at Houck Middle School in Salem and a descendant of two Northwest pioneer families, thought about naming the new elementary school opening this year in West Salem.

"If we name it after a person, we honor one person," Douglas said. "If we name it after the Kalapuya people, we honor a whole nation."

With the support of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Douglas submitted his name idea last September to the Citizen Bond Oversight Committee of the Salem-Keizer School District.

The School Board approved the name at its January meeting this year and the new school held a dedication, thanking Douglas and featuring Grand Ronde participation, on Friday, Sept. 2.

"Welcome to Kalapuya country," said Tribal Council Secretary Kathleen Tom on behalf of the Tribe to the assembled group of 100 or more. "We're wishing you happiness and many learning opportunities."

And then she added maybe the first lesson to be taught at Kalapuya Elementary. "This is part of our ceded lands," Tom said.

Tribal members Bobby Mercier and Brian Krehbiel, Cultural Resources employees for the Tribe, sang and drummed in honor and welcome.

In the wake of the new name, Grand Ronde Tribal members also supported an effort to make the school's mascot the condor. Tribal support for the condor as mascot parallels a Tribal project in conjunction with the Oregon Zoo and other partners to bring the condor back to Oregon. Condors were considered extinct in the state in the 1930s.

Kalapuya Elementary Principal Jennifer Neitzel led the school's incoming fifth-grade class in the first performance of the school's Kalapuya song: "We're gonna fly; we're gonna soar. We are the Kalapuya Condors."

Collaboration between the Tribe and the school, in the form of education and cultural exchanges, is already in progress, said Tribal member David Lewis, manager of the Tribe's Cultural Resources Department.

"In the first month of school, we will be at assemblies to teach about the Kalapuya Tribe," Lewis said.



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Council member Chris Mercier looks through a book in the library at Kalapuya Elementary School after the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Tribal members Brian Krehbiel, left, the Tribe's cultural education specialist, and Bobby Mercier, the Tribe's language and culture specialist, drum during Kalapuya Elementary School's ribbon cutting ceremony in Salem on Friday, Sept. 2. Behind them are Tribal Council members Toby McClary, third from right, Valorie Sheker, second from right, and Chris Mercier. The school is the first in the Salem-Keizer School District to be named after the Native Americans who inhabited western Oregon before the arrival of white settlers.

"This is turning into a very good partnership. I think as we go forward, there will be more."

The partnership already has brought in a showcase full of Kalapuya artifacts – from arrowheads to baskets to history books – from the collection of a retired local librarian.

Joining Tom at the event were Tribal Council members Chris Mercier, Valorie Sheker and Toby Mc-

Clary, and Tribal member Shelby Rogers, who is the school district's Indian Education Program assistant.

It took "a lot of communication" to make this happen, said Rogers.

"What a glorious way to spread the word," said Douglas's wife, Kathy, a second-grade teacher at Victor Point Elementary School in Silver Falls. "If you teach it to 500 students, they'll spread it around

to 500 more."

"It's awesome," said Claudia Crocker of Salem, whose granddaughter, Madi Kleiber, was the fifth-grader who cut the ceremonial ribbon. "I truly believe that Indians deserve the respect for a lot of things we've done to them."

"It's casinos that we always hear about the Indians, but kids connect with the good stuff of their heritage."

"It's good for the kids to learn about different cultures," said Neitzel. "This is showing respect for the land that the Kalapuya lived on. We're thrilled that the land was taken such good care of." ■

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