

'We are all experts in a field'

TRANSITION continued
from front page

He had to resign his job and adjust to a whole new work schedule almost immediately.

"It's eye-opening," said George, "to understand what it takes behind the scenes to operate the Tribe as a whole, and all its economic developments."

Together with the behind-the-scenes knowledge, George said he also sees a far more personal response to serving.

"It's such an honor to speak for the membership," he said. "It's always been an honor to work for the Tribe, but it's more of an honor to be a leader."

George worked at Nanitch Sahallie, the Tribe's former youth treatment center, as a Food Service assistant from 1991-98 and as a Vocational Rehabilitation specialist in the Portland office from 1998 up until his election in September 2012.

His 21 years as a Tribal employee have made his first term on Tribal Council something of a whirlwind. "Boy, I'll tell ya, it's ... what a difference," he said.

Toby McClary is currently Tribal Council secretary. Before being elected in September 2009, he worked at Spirit Mountain Casino as Shipping and Receiving supervisor. Before that, he was a staff photographer with *Smoke Signals*.

McClary said he was surprised on Tribal Council with "the amount of time it takes to do the job correctly. The level of decision-making was surprising to me."

For Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom, "Being on Tribal Council is an honor the membership has bestowed on me, a responsibility that I don't take lightly. Being an employee has constraints. I think a large part of the organization has forgotten we work for the membership. We are here to serve the members, not the organization."

Tom worked at Nanitch Sahallie from 1989-2002 and has served on Tribal Council since 2005.

"It gave me the freedom to have a voice," Tom said. "It gives me that voice for the people, and to make decisions for what's in the best interest of our membership."

Work on Tribal Council gave June Sherer "a whole different perspective. You're like a bird looking down. You have access to a lot of information that employees don't have."

Sherer worked in marketing for the casino from 1996-99 and has been on Tribal Council since 1999

with a two-year break in between.

She said her strong belief in and support for the Tribal Constitution has meant a lot of pressure and responsibility, particularly with the currently unfolding enrollment audit.

"Sometimes it's very difficult when there is a blurred line," she said. "It's difficult when you feel that a person is really a Tribal member, but the details of the Constitution require the decision. We've got a mess to clean up, and it's not a fun thing."

For outgoing Tribal Council member Chris Mercier, who has now moved on to law school

in Michigan, the biggest change was the difference in how people responded to him as an employee and as a Tribal Council member.

As a Tribal Council member, he said, "There are people who won't like you no matter what, and people for whom you can do nothing wrong." But, he says, "It's true what they say, if no one's mad at you, you haven't made a decision yet."

Mercier served on Tribal Council starting in 2004, as chair for one year. He worked as a reporter at *Smoke Signals* intermittently from

2000-02. In 2002-03, he worked at Spirit Mountain Casino as a cage cashier, and as the Tribal librarian in 2004. And back in 1996, he worked at the casino and part-time for *Smoke Signals*.

He said it was difficult to adjust to the new level of interest members of the Tribe had in him as an elected official. While people came up and "bent his ear" as an employee at the casino or in the library, he said it "tends to be a lot more intense on Tribal Council."

In addition, Mercier said he was surprised at how some who supported him when he was running opposed him when he arrived at Tribal Council.

Of those powers that Tribal Council afforded him, he focused on transparency in government. "I'm glad we revamped our Web site," he said. "There are a lot of documents for download. You can watch a lot of meetings live. That's transparency, openness."

George, wrapping up his first year on Tribal Council, said he has been impressed that the nine-member leadership group has specialists in almost every area.

"Each of us operates in our gifts, with our special knowledge. ... Cheryle (Kennedy) knows health care, June knows Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and my specialty is culture."

"We are all experts in a field." ■

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~ Jon A. George
Tribal Council member

30th Restoration Celebration Call for Artists

The Restoration Planning Committee invites you to submit your design for the 30th Restoration Celebration graphic that will be printed on T-shirts and sweatshirts. The design should highlight the Tribe's 30th year of restoration. The clothing will be available for purchase during this year's Restoration Celebration.

Submissions must be received no later than September 15, 2013. Email your design to: publicaffairs@grandronde.org or send to:
The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
Public Affairs
9615 Grand Ronde Rd.
Grand Ronde, OR 97347

For more information, please call Julie Brown @ 503-879-2186

