

Two new nurse practitioners join Tribal clinic

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Nurse Practitioner Victoria Wright, 59, joined the Tribal Health & Wellness Clinic on Aug. 29 with some 25 years of experience under her stethoscope.

Amanda Mehlhoff, 36, also joined the clinic at the end of September in her first nurse practitioner position since graduating with a master's degree in Nursing from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash.

Wright and Mehlhoff fill half of the four nurse practitioner staff positions at the clinic.

They are ramping up on clinic systems and procedures. When ready, they are expecting to treat 14 to 18 patients daily.

Long term, the Tribal clinic encourages its different specialists to work together, where appropriate, on patient issues, such as integrating treatment for medical and mental health patients.

Long term for the nurse practitioners, Wright said she would like to focus on wellness.

"On more natural ways of pain control," she said. "We're seeing more deaths from overdoses of controlled substances as well as more

addiction and dependencies. In the U.S., 46 deaths a day are attributed to these overdoses."

Wright said her efforts are looking at pain control through physical, stretching and massage therapies, and by building muscle mass. Of course, the controlled medicine forms of pain control still have their place with injuries or following surgery. Holistic is for the long run, she said. Better physical health means a patient will not be as susceptible to pain.

Mehlhoff comes to Grand Ronde "to provide holistic primary care, and help patients avoid unnecessary hospitalizations." She has been a nurse at Salem Health since 2007, working initially in the medical surgical unit and the last four years in the intensive care unit. She worked part-time while attending Gonzaga to earn her master's degree.



Victoria Wright

"My most satisfying moments in nursing have been during my clinical rotations as a nurse practitioner," Mehlhoff said. "It feels really rewarding to be able to help prevent complications or conditions with patients. To help them cut down on their smoking, to treat high blood pressure or to help a scared kid, or adult for that matter, through an uncomfortable exam.

"It is so exciting to have patients come back and say, 'Did you see my blood pressure?' or 'I'm down to half a pack!' These things seem so simple in comparison with many of the things I did as a nurse in the ICU, but they can really make a difference in the long run for patients and families. It feels good to be a part of that, even though the patients are doing the real work."

Wright worked at Harborview Hospital in Seattle in the intensive care unit for more than four years as a registered nurse and at



Amanda Mehlhoff

Evergreen Hospital in Kirkland, Wash., in the Oncology Department for about five years. She also has worked in urgent care, family practice and internal medical in Washington state as a nurse practitioner for three years.

Wright has a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Washington and a master's in nursing through Seattle Pacific University. She is currently working on a doctorate in nursing from the University of Central Florida and a master's in mental health counseling through Stetson University.

Wright lives in Grand Ronde while her husband, Robert, who works as a critical care registered nurse on an amyotrophic lateral sclerosis transport in the greater Tacoma-Seattle area, finds new work in this area.

Wright was born and raised in Seattle. Her family includes five grown children, all living in Washington state, three stepchildren and 12 grandchildren. During her off hours, she is an artist and jewelry maker.

Mehlhoff, who was raised in McMinnville, lives in Willamina. Her off hours are spent with her husband, Ryan, her 2-year-old daughter, Amelia, and their dogs. ■

Hospice seeking Native jewelry

The nonprofit Willamette Valley Hospice in Salem is planning a used jewelry sale in the spring as a fundraiser and is seeking donations from talented Native jewelry makers.

Those who would like to donate can contact Hospice board member Steve Bobb Sr. at 503-876-3118. ■

St. Michael's offers weekly brunch

St. Michael's Catholic Church offers an open house brunch every Sunday following Mass. The brunch is free to the community.

Brunch begins at about 11:30 a.m. following the 10:30 a.m. Mass. Mass attendance is not required for brunch attendance. For more information, contact Janelle Justen at 503-550-0923. ■

Damage forced the relocation of classrooms

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The water, which was anywhere from a half-inch to an inch deep, was discovered later that evening by the Tribe's security officers.

"There is an ongoing investigation and any leads that come in will be followed up by officers from the department," said Grand Ronde Police Chief Al LaChance.

Thorsgard said the water damage forced the relocation of five classrooms – the Mawich, Chak Chak, Kwis Kwis, K-3 Immersion and Lilu classes were forced to move to temporary facilities. In addition, the K-5 After School program also was relocated.

Thorsgard said that classes were canceled on Monday, Sept. 29, to relocate classes and that it may be three to four weeks before restoration work is complete and the classes will be able to move back, which also will likely result in at least one educational day being lost.

"Overall, I would say the hardest part was for the preschool kids to adjust to a rapid relocation and keeping them happy and focused on school readiness," Thorsgard said.

"I would like to thank everyone who had a hand in helping us make it through the day," said Early Childhood Education Program Manager Vikki Bishop on Monday,



Photo courtesy of the Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department

Water can be seen on the floor of a classroom in the Tribe's Early Childhood Education building after it was intentionally flooded by vandals on Sunday, Sept. 28.

Sept. 29, in a staffwide e-mail. "Moving our classrooms, offices, computers, to name just a portion of the work. Tyson (Mercier) and his staff worked all day doing whatever was needed. And a special thanks to the Housekeeping staff that came in Sunday night and prevented more damage from occurring."

Servpro, which specializes in water and fire damage restoration, was hired to perform the cleanup.

The vandalism was addressed by Tribal Council at the Tuesday, Sept. 30, Legislative Action Committee meeting.

Tribal Council Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr. thanked staff members for their quick response to the emergency on Sunday night and for creating a plan to move the classes to other locations.

"I don't know who did the damage," said Tribal Council member

Cheryle A. Kennedy, "but I just think it is terrible. It's just awful that someone would ... deliberately flood their building and cause all the damage and displacement of the children; that is just a very horrible, terrible thing to do. I just hope that whoever did it would own up to their responsibility and try to make amends for what was done."

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno said during the Oct. 7 Legislative Action Committee hearing that people need to understand that when they vandalize Tribal buildings, they are destroying their own property.

"I think we need to step back and make people understand in this community this is all of our stuff," he said. "To tear up your Education building, that's like tearing up your own house. That's ridiculous. I think we need to deliver that message. You impact these little kids who are very innocent and have nothing to do with any of this stuff, and now you disrupted a big piece of our education."

Acting General Manager Chris Leno called on the community to help solve this crime against Tribal members.

"This act of vandalism at our school comes with a high dollar cost to the Tribe and affects our youngest children," Chris Leno said. "We want and need the help of the community to solve this crime." ■