

# Jordan Mercier uses his education to complement cultural interests

By Ron Karten

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

Tribal member Jordan Mercier, 29, knew early on that he wanted to work with Grand Ronde Tribal peoples. Today, he is the Tribe's Cultural Protection coordinator and works at Chachalu, the Tribal Museum and Cultural Center.

"In both his work and personal contributions," says Jan Looking Wolf Reibach, manager of the Land and Culture Department, "Jordan's efforts strengthen the Tribe's Circle of Culture. Chachalu is fortunate to have him on our team."

In return, says Mercier in an e-mail, "I am proud of our Tribal community, the many successes we have earned over the years and the countless obstacles we have overcome."

Chachalu is part of "a diverse, talented and inspiring department staff," Mercier says. "I do not take for granted this privilege of working for my community. I strive to demonstrate gratitude in all of my actions, and to honor everyone who has offered their time, trust and teachings to me."

He credits his family, the Mercier/Hudson family, going back to John B. Hudson and Hattie Hudson (Sands) on his grandfather's (Vincent Mercier) mother's side; and Francis and Marie Mercier (Petite) on Vincent Mercier's father's side. All have walked on, but their influence, and the influence of the others, down to his parents, Michael and Tammy Mercier, continues.

In speaking at the recent Tribal History Conference held at Chachalu, Jordan's remarks also started with a traditional introduction of his family.

"My grandpa, Vincent, used to tell stories about Grand Ronde all the time. He was very proud of our Tribe and our culture, and he shared that with us as kids. My grandpa taught me phrases and gave me a language book. He'd do cultural presentations in my classes at school."

His father, Michael, supported his growing interest in the Tribe.

"He grew up in Grand Ronde, so he has really helped me become more connected," Jordan says of his father.

Jordan credits his Grand Ronde relatives who set a good example for him.

"I remember going out to visit Auntie Ila Dowd when I was little and how excited we would all get for her to say 'The Lord's Prayer' in Chinuk," he recalls.

Jordan continued studying the Tribal trade language both at Portland State University's Native American Student and Community Center and later at the Portland satellite office.

Indians from across the Northwest and farther afield also studied the language, Jordan says. They

learned it "not because it was their traditional language, but because of their interest in Native languages and their involvement in the Portland Native community."

At the Tribe's Portland office, he continued to study Chinuk Wawa and other lifeways of Native people.

He graduated from Portland State with a bachelor's degree in sociology and psychology. He focused on Indigenous Native studies, race/ethnic relations, decolonization, social justice and community organizing.

Cornel Pewewardy, Portland State Indigenous Studies Department director, "ignited my interest for Native social justice," Jordan says. "He helped me to contextualize my experience as a Native person."

The list of those who influenced him is almost endless: Henry Zenk, Jedd Schrock, Eric Bernando and Sky Hopinka, a fellow Portland State alumni from the Ho-Chunk Tribe, helped him learn the language.

Greg Archuleta took him under wing and let him tag along on cultural excursions. He taught Jordan to gather plants, weave and carve. He introduced Jordan to Columbia River art, the Tribe's stories, history and important historical places.

He credits his cousins — Bobby Mercier, Brian Krehbiel and Travis Stewart — for "generously sharing all their teachings and vast cultural knowledge with me and teaching me what it means to be Grand Ronde, and how to better carry myself in the community."

All these things have "strengthened my sense of identity and self-esteem, and deepened my connection to the Tribal community."

Professionally, Jordan says, he wants "to continue to serve the Grand Ronde Tribal community and government in the best way that my capacity and skills make possible, focusing on whatever issues and needs are most relevant at the time."

"Personally, I hope to be living in Grand Ronde with my wife, Amanda, and our daughter, Ila (who also is a member of the Tribe), and at least two more kids."

Amanda says about her husband that "he has a good heart and that he really loves his family and the Tribe. It's from this place that all his hard work and devotion comes from. He is committed to serving his community, absolutely driven by his passion for culture, and is always seeking to include his family as part of both."

"Especially with the birth of our daughter, Ila. He has been singing



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Jordan Mercier knew for years he wanted to work for the Grand Ronde Tribe. He grew up in the Portland area, graduated from Portland State University and is currently the Tribe's Cultural Protection coordinator.**

her canoe songs since before she was born and having her has really bolstered his motivation to be an active part of the community. Jordan wants to share everything with Ila so that she will always feel at home in the Tribe.

"As his wife, I am continually proud and inspired by Jordan. Watching him grow as a father and a Tribal member has been one of the most beautiful and profound experiences of my life."

"I am who I am," Jordan adds, "and I do what I do because of the constant love from my parents, and the encouragement and support they have given me throughout my life."

He calls his involvement with the culture of Achaf-hammi, the Grand Ronde plankhouse, and the Canoe Family "life-changing and transformative" experiences.

Chopping wood, singing songs, and learning about and practicing Tribal traditions and protocols have taught him "a lot about how to be a part of something much bigger than myself."

In the Paddle to Quinault Canoe Journey of 2013, he says, "I was able to witness for myself the power that canoe and plankhouse culture have to bring healing to people."

"Just seeing all the different Grand Ronde families come together as one Canoe Family and sharing the values of well-being and sobriety is an incredibly powerful experience. Creating a safe space for people that is full of traditional art, music, foods and activities is healing. It's a place to strengthen community by helping Tribal members better get to know their people and themselves by taking positive action, giving of themselves and working together."

Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor brought Mercier on to work on outreach projects while he was studying at the Portland office. He worked as a technical assistant

for Public Affairs starting in April 2012. His work included public outreach through cultural demonstrations, presentations and other representation on behalf of the Tribe.

Since September 2013, he has been working full-time in Land and Culture.

David Harrelson, program manager for the Tribal Historic Preservation Office where Mercier works, says, "He has dedicated himself selflessly to the betterment of our community. In his work with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, he represents our Tribe in a good way through providing an understanding of our culture and history to public agencies as well as Tribal members."

All this and more make him a steady and long-term model for those who are growing in Tribal life after him.

"To be called a role model is an honor and it makes me feel happy," Jordan says. "I will strive to live up to the responsibilities associated with this label and continue to promote positive growth in our community."

In this role, he says, he will work "to create opportunities" for other members of the Tribe. He wants to help them "feel and really become empowered, so that they get involved with the Tribal community and contribute to the great things that are happening here."

He grew up in Portland. The family now lives in McMinnville where Jordan's list of interests shines another light on an already prodigious number of talents. He names parenting, collecting vinyl records, guitar, piano, hiking, reading, camping, writing, basketry, carving, drawing and traveling as his interests.

As one of the Tribe's best, the community can look forward to his contributions for the foreseeable future. ■