

# Changes at the Health & Wellness Center

## Three new employees changing face of local care

By Brent Merrill  
Smoke Signals staff writer

Myriad changes at the Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center could translate into better health care for the Tribal membership in the near future.

New Health Services Executive Director Kelly Rowe, who started on Monday, Nov. 9, has worked in health care since 2002. She is a Tribal member and has been a member of the Tribe's Health Committee since June.

New medical provider Dr. Paul Vitt, who started on Friday, Sept. 4, has 35 years of medical practice experience. He worked with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, the Quinault Indian Nation and the Nez Perce Tribe before coming to Grand Ronde.

New Behavioral Health Director Jan Kaschmitter has been in Grand Ronde for more than five years as a mental health counselor and interim Behavioral Health director.

"Jan brings a lot of experience to our program and we are excited to have her serve in this position," said Tresa Mercier, the Health & Wellness Center's Business Office manager. "She (Kaschmitter) seems like she is really eager to help."

Mercier said there will be a renewed effort to build the Behavioral Health program back to previous staffing numbers. Kaschmitter will eventually work with a full staff of behavioral health counselors and alcohol and drug counselors, she said.

The Tribe's Behavioral Health program is a fully integrated outpatient mental health and alcohol and drug assessment and treatment program licensed by the state of Oregon.

"Her (Kaschmitter's) thoughts about treating the youth and including the whole healthy lifestyle; I think she is really good with that," said Mercier. "And she's good with the whole holistic part of the Health & Wellness Center. We should be working all together."

Kaschmitter, who is an Army veteran who spent five years as a communications specialist, said she made a decision in her mid-30s to do something that she had always wanted to do and that was begin a career helping people. She said now that she's the program director, it will be the best of both worlds.

Kaschmitter holds a master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Eastern Washington University and is a licensed master's level clinician in Washington and Oregon.

She said she can run the program and have the oversight she needs to be effective, but also maintain the one-on-one moments she gets with patients.

"I love it and I have a passion for it," said Kaschmitter. "This is the best opportunity ever. It's just very exciting. It feels like everything is coming together now."

"I'm really optimistic about being able to rebuild the team. It's important for the community. It's important to have a healthy com-



Kelly Rowe

munity and to offer those services in the community. I want to be able to provide the best services possible to the people I see and that's always been very important. We can heal. We can help the younger generation move forward."

General Manager David Fullerton said the fact that Kaschmitter has already been in the community for some time will be a big help.

"She has a feel for the membership and she has had enough time to know what the community needs so she'll be a good fit," said Fullerton. "I think it will be a good time for her to build a program. She has a good opportunity to build a team that meets the needs of the community. I think she'll do well. She's connected."

Kaschmitter, who has been married for 38 years and has four children and one grandchild, said the behavioral health work is tough, but rewarding.

"Being a therapist is very much an opportunity and it's an honor," said Kaschmitter. "When someone comes into my office, I'm walking with them on a sacred journey. I feel very connected with being here. It's very rewarding and I feel very honored that I'm allowed to be here. There is a huge sense of fulfillment. We are all in this together."

The Tribe's Health & Wellness Center also offers other services, such as medical, dental, optometry, community health, adult foster care, speech and language pathology, and a pharmacy.

Rowe said mental health services are key to making the clinic more of full-service provider by treating a whole patient.

"The holistic approach isn't just your physical health," said Rowe. "The reality is this is part of your health. I'm not afraid to support the meaningful things that need to happen for us to feel comfortable going to seek any kind of health care that we need and doing it right here in one place."

Having everything all in one place is nothing new to Vitt, who spent 25 years providing family care in a busy hospital southwest of Philadelphia, Pa., in a city called Media.

Vitt, who specializes in family medicine, said he feels at home in Grand Ronde.

"The Tribal members and the clinic itself, it's been such an uplifting experience," said Vitt. "There



Jan Kaschmitter

have been a lot of positive attitudes and everyone has been very welcoming. The members have been outstanding. From almost day one they made me feel like I was part of the family."

Rowe said she was "incredibly excited" to hear Vitt was here and it made her "feel good" to know he has worked in Indian Country before coming to Grand Ronde.

"Understanding Tribal culture is greatly important. It's that respect for everyone," said Rowe. "If you can find people that are truly passionate about it and they are champions for it, that's when you get the right mix. You get the people that are willing."

Vitt graduated from Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, interned at Delaware County Memorial Hospital and did his residency at Hahnemann University Hospital at Drexel University. He said his time at the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho was rewarding.

"It was a great experience. I really got to know folks," said Vitt. "The only thing that pulled me away was an opportunity to live on the Oregon Coast and I had always wanted to do that."

After working for the Siletz Tribe and then spending some time on the Washington coast with the Quinault Nation, Vitt found out about the opportunity to work in Grand Ronde.

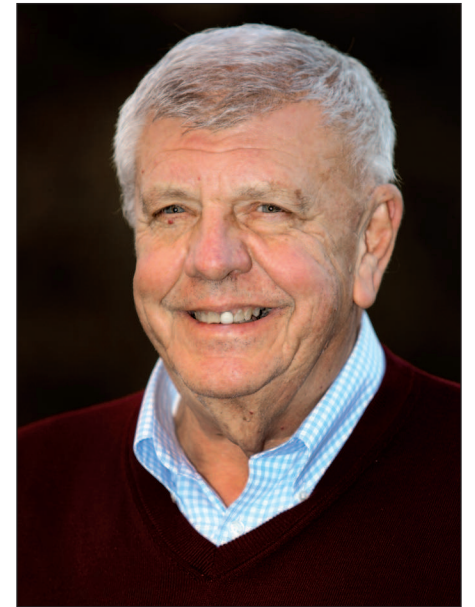
"I absolutely love the people I'm working with. It's a good team," said Vitt. "I think that it (the Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center) is really on the road to being a premier medical facility. I think it's going in the right direction. I think it's going to work out real good."

Vitt, who has three adult children and two grandchildren with his wife Beth, said his personal values match the traditional values of the Tribe.

"I've become interested in cultural ways," said Vitt. "In particular, I love the way there is respect for Elders. I just wish that our society as a whole could adopt that attitude that our Native Americans have here in the Northwest."

"The other thing that I thought was really endearing and wished that I had been a part of it is that being a Tribal member you have a sense of belonging; a cause that's bigger than yourself. I just think it is something special to belong to a Tribe."

Vitt currently lives in West Sa-



Dr. Paul Vitt

lem and said he would like to buy a home and retire in Oregon.

"This is where I want to be," said Vitt.

Vitt enjoys woodworking, hunting and outdoor photography in his personal time. He has won people over in Grand Ronde with a caring, comforting demeanor.

"He's really humble. He's really helpful," said Mercier. "I feel like he has the patient's best interest in his heart. That really seems like that is where he is coming from."

Rowe has experience as a clinical analyst and coordinated compensation and benefits for Mercy Medical Center, has been a financial manager for Centennial Medical Group and most recently worked as a transformation portfolio manager for Umpqua Health Alliance, all in Roseburg.

"After I got into health care I always thought 'wouldn't it be great' to come back and to give back to the Tribe because they supported my education," said Rowe, who earned a master's in Business Administration and Health Care Administration from Marylhurst University in Portland and a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Accounting from Eastern Oregon University in La Grande.

"To be able to give back and be part of the community, to feel more involved, it's been pretty important to me," said Rowe. "I'm here. This is it. This is the dream. I'm really excited to be here and to dig in."

"Kelly is a Tribal member who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position," said Fullerton. "It's an opportunity to have a clinic director that has experience supervising doctors, has clinic experience and has experience working with the Oregon Health Plan. It's an opportunity to have a director that has experience in the medical field, working with providers and also the business side. She has a good opportunity to grow with the clinic. We're excited about having her."

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno said he "loves" the fact that Grand Ronde now has a Tribal member in charge at the Health & Wellness Center.

"She clearly understands the mission of the Tribe, but she also

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