

New optometrist focuses on improved Tribal eye care

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

Dr. Andrew Ngo, the Tribe's new optometrist, has been working at the Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center since the beginning of February.

Ngo — pronounced "No" like in the first James Bond film — recently worked for National Vision Inc. for the last two and half years. Before that, he interned at Henry Ford OptimEyes in Michigan and completed optometry school at Western University of Health Science in California.

"I was originally born in Portland and grew up in the area all my life," said Ngo. "I grew up in southeast Portland for the first six years and then we moved out to Beaverton. I went to Oregon State University for college and then ended up in optometry school at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona.

"And, yes, someone references the 'Dr. No' connection at least once every day," he said, getting the obvious Bond film reference out of the way right off the bat.

Ngo, 29, was recruited by Reserve Nation for the position in Grand Ronde.

Reserve Nation is a direct placement recruitment firm that is dedicated to underserved communities across the nation. Their mission is to connect medical providers with



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Dr. Andrew Ngo is the Tribe's new optometrist.

meaningful, permanent opportunities in rural and urban areas nationwide.

"He has been a fantastic addition to the clinic," said Health Services Executive Director Kelly Rowe. "He comes in filling some big shoes with Dr. (Charlean) White having been here so long. I've had so many great comments from some of the Tribal members that have already come in."

Ngo said that after he visited the clinic and completed his interview process, he knew this is where he wanted to be.

"I liked the area so I accepted the job offer and here I am," said

Ngo. "I had been looking at various positions and this came up. I got a chance to talk to Dr. White a little about the clinic and the equipment here is pretty good; much better than what I was working with before."

Ngo said one of the nice things about being at the Health & Wellness Center is the opportunity to make a difference with patients.

"I feel like I have a lot of time with patients," said Ngo. "They have been pretty receptive to having that time with the doctor, which is what I wanted versus the corporate setting where they kind of just push you through a little bit. That was one of the main reasons for me accepting this position here. Just being able to connect with patients a little more.

"Managing their eye care to the full scope of my practice, which is every doctor's dream pretty much. The equipment and the tools here are very comprehensive."

Rowe said she has been impressed with Ngo.

"He brings a wealth of knowledge and he does see that reverence for our Elders and our patients that are Tribal members coming in," said Rowe. "He has some great ideas about how to provide access to services here. That's exciting to me because that's exactly the kind of innovation I really want to stir and get everyone to really think about."

Ngo said he hopes to one day soon bring another optometrist on board and that he will be looking to acquire more staffing in the near future.

"It's definitely been a new experience for me," said Ngo. "People (here on the Reservation) are very close to each other. It's been a transition from when I was seeing patients every 15 to 20 minutes. You don't really get to know them that well. But here you can actually make meaningful connections and I feel like you have more of a chance to make an impact."

Ngo said he is proud that he has accomplished great things in the eyes of his family. He said his family feels pride that they have a doctor in the family and he said the two cultures — Native and Vietnamese Asian — share common values.

"Growing up in a Vietnamese-Asian family part of it is they want you to have a stable, good career," said Ngo. "They pushed a bit when I was younger, but I'm glad that they did. They've expressed their happiness. It's definitely a good feeling to honor your parents and follow what they had envisioned for you.

"There is a high reverence for Elders in this community. And that is definitely something that we look to our Elders for guidance and wisdom. I plan to be here for a while." ■

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Canoe Meetings

Hello Community! We would like to invite you all to the Canoe meetings set for this year.

**When: March 12,
April 9, May 14, June 12**

Who: Those people interested in participating in Canoe Journey

Time: 12-3pm (Lunch is provided)

Where: Grand Ronde Tribal Gym

**Please contact Cristina Lara for more information
503.879.2040**