

'She's done a great job'

STORE continued from front page

For the first time in my life I'm excited to come to work every day. Everybody has been so supportive and so helpful since I've been here. I just love it."

Nelson actually delivered her daughter's baby when the doctor stepped out of the room.

"Me and the nurse had to deliver the baby," says Nelson. "It was awesome. It was amazing."

Nelson, who has two daughters and a son and now her first grandchild, says she is very family oriented. She says she loves working for the Tribe because it is a big family.

"I have the most amazing staff I have ever worked with in my entire life," says Nelson. "They are an amazing crew. Everyone here takes ownership of the store. They care what happens here. I make them a part of any changes. It's their store."

Nelson's supervisor is the Tribe's Chief Financial Officer Chris Leno and he says Nelson is willing to do whatever it takes to make the store successful.

"She's done a great job," says Leno. "She's very energetic and always looking to make improvements. She very much advocates for her people down there. She's done a good job with that. It seems to me that there is not a job that she's not willing to do. She'll be outside cleaning, inside cooking, just whatever needs to be done so I think her staff appreciates that approach of demonstrating by example."

Leno points to improvements

Nelson has made at the Long Bell Diner as an example of the good work she has been doing since coming on board earlier this year.

Leno says the Grand Ronde Fuel and Food Company Board of Directors had been considering franchise options for the diner to increase profits. He says Nelson wanted to try to turn things around and asked for a chance to see what she could do.

"They gave her the go-ahead and she jumped right into that," says Leno.

Nelson looked at the menu and the pricing of the items on the menu, began to negotiate with vendors and brought in a hot case, which, she says, seemed like a natural move for the store.

"We're a convenience store," says Nelson. "They (customers) want something that is already cooked. They want it ready so they can grab it and be back on the road."

"Her approach was to bring in variety, improve the menu that we have and try to look at pricing to try and make it profitable," says Leno. "I think she has done a good job with that. We see the numbers. Sales are increasing definitely. Even with the investments we have made in equipment, sales are still up and margins are better. We expect that to continue."

Nelson says she looks at the diner as an opportunity to prove herself.

"I like a challenge," says Nelson. "My biggest background is food. I took that on as a challenge and it has just grown dramatically. The numbers are showing that we are up from last year."

Controller Linda Hanna confirms Nelson's excitement over increased revenue at Grand Ronde Station.

"She's made a big difference," Hanna says. "I was involved in the interviews when we hired Lisa. She impressed us right from that point. We had no qualms that she would do a wonderful job and she has proven that. She has jumped in and turned things around at the store and the employees are happy."

Hanna agrees with Leno in that she sees Nelson being supportive and encouraging to her staff.

"She provides them with good, positive feedback. She just is that kind of person," says Hanna. "She really takes a lot of pride in her work. She has a great rapport with people. She encourages the employees to take ownership of what they are doing."

Hanna also agrees with Leno that management can make a huge difference.

"Our profit margin has increased," says Hanna. "She's made a lot of changes with vendors, she's getting better prices, she's doing smarter purchasing, negotiating with vendors and I think it has made a big difference. We're very pleased with the direction. She truly cares about her employees and the store and the Tribe, and she wants to be successful and she wants the Tribe to be successful. I think she is doing a fantastic job."

Nelson says the staff at Grand Ronde Station is a team.

"To me, a manager is only as good as her employees," says Nelson. "I can only be as successful as my crew and you can't be successful if you don't have a successful crew. All of them as a group are amazing."

One of the employees at the Grand Ronde Station who has benefitted from Nelson's presence has been newly promoted Assistant Manager Christina Sanchez.

Sanchez, who has worked at the store for six years and schedules staff, has been front and center for all the recent changes.

"I think they are very positive

changes," says Sanchez. "We've seen a major increase in sales. We get a lot of compliments. It feels great because I feel the store is clean and it reflects on all of us as a team."

Sanchez says that Nelson has really delivered on the family atmosphere at work.

"It is nice when we can all get together and get along and be like a big family," says Sanchez. "It makes a major difference. We all work better for each other as a team."

Even with all the changes to the diner and with the improvements to the store itself, the biggest moneymaker for Grand Ronde Station remains fuel sales.

Nelson says despite having a background in managing restaurants and convenience stores, such as the Red Lobster in Salem and Village Inns in California and Colorado, she has embraced the challenge of keeping the Tribe competitive with local fuel sales.

"I figure out what I need to do and I go for it," says Nelson.

Leno says the fuel sales have their own strategy and that Nelson is executing that strategy well.

"We want to be competitive with our pricing and Lisa definitely monitors the local area to see what (prices) other people are offering," says Leno. "She stays on top of that daily. She's done a real good job of coming in and taking responsibility for that fuel pricing because it is a big part of what we do down there."

Leno emphasizes that all profits are increasing at Grand Ronde Station and that Nelson and her staff deserve credit for making it happen.

"All sales are up," says Leno. "The store is operating at a high-level; things are going really well. She has made a huge commitment to making sure the store is organized well. In particular on the outside, things are clean, the sidewalks are clean and landscaping is kept up, which creates a good impression on the customers." ■

Groups form Helping Hands

The Clothes Closet, iskam mək^hmək haws, Empowerment Outreach Ministries, Lighthouse Church and A Cause For Paws have started an ad hoc group called Grand Ronde Helping Hands and are inviting community members to join the effort of supporting local families.

"Our goal is to bring those of us together who are supporting families in Grand Ronde to share the services and resources we provide and create a resource guide we can all use," said Food Bank Coordinator Francene Ambrose. The next Helping Hands meeting will be held at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 13, at The Food Bank, 9675 Grand Ronde Road. In addition, a collection day at the Food Bank is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 10, and is seeking donations of personal care products, school supplies and pet items.

Ambrose said Helping Hands also is seeking someone with graphic arts skills to help create a logo that represents all of the organizations that can be used to advertise on business cards, a banner and possibly a website. A small honorarium will be offered.

"If you provide any type of services to families in our community, please consider attending," Ambrose added. "We are looking for meal site calendars, food box sites, clothes closets, showers and laundry services. We are asking churches, church groups, departments and support groups to share with us."

If you are interested in joining the effort, contact Ambrose at 503-879-3663 or at fambrose@marionpolkfoodshare.org. ■

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