

Behavioral Health adds two counselors

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Tribe's Health & Wellness Center continues to grow and become an overall "wellness center" as more professionals are hired to complete the staff.

The latest additions are two new counselors in the Behavioral Health Department.

Jackie Weasel is the new post treatment support counselor who will be working mostly out of the Women's Transitional Home with clients returning to the community after rehabilitation or incarceration.

Weasel is an Assiniboine Tribal member from the Fort Belknap community near Harlem, Mont.

And Maria Ulery-LaFriniere, who started working for the Tribe in July, is the new chemical dependency counselor. She is a member of the White Earth Band of Chippewa who previously worked for the White Bison organization and for the Siletz Tribe.

"They both have very solid A and D (alcohol and drug counseling) credentials, but they also have that cultural piece that really brings the whole thing together in my mind," said Behavioral Health Director Jan Kaschmitter. "I think they will be great in terms of fitting in. My whole team has a passion for what they do."

Kaschmitter said Weasel came to Grand Ronde and hit the ground running and hasn't slowed down yet.

"She does have great experience," Kaschmitter said. "Jackie is a Native and she has a passion for what she does. She's very positive. She's very motivated. We're getting a nice program developed at the house. I feel really good about where we are at this point in time."

Weasel, who will be providing support services for residents of the Women's Transitional Home, said that she has been going strong since beginning her position with the Tribe on July 25.

"Sometimes when you jump into a position that you have a passion for you have no problem going full force because you have the skills and the abilities and the passion to do it," said Weasel. "I support their short- and long-term goals they are working toward. I coordinate their cultural and sobriety events that fit their individual plans and I help them get to and from their meetings."

So far, Weasel has taken a client for an overnight stay in Olympia to support the Tribe's recent Canoe Family journey and she took a client to a one-day Native American Rehabilitation Association conference in Portland.

"That was nice," said Weasel. "I like to support them in that way because I like to show them there are a lot of things you can do in the sober world and a lot more opportunities for you. It makes the program that much stronger when you have that compassion for the clients you work with, but also the job that you do."

Kaschmitter said Weasel is already doing exactly what she wants



Jackie Weasel

the person in the post treatment support counselor role to do — be present and attentive to the client's needs.

"She's upbeat and she's engaging them," said Kaschmitter. "We want to be able to support a solid recovery."

Weasel said she was raised in a very traditional family and that her grandmother was from Canada and her grandfather was from the Fort Belknap Reservation 60 miles south of the Canadian border. She said her grandparents met at a powwow.

Weasel graduated from Northern Montana University in Havre with a bachelor's degree and worked for her Tribe in human services and the Indian Health Service.

After working for her own Tribe for years, Weasel gained a case manager position at Chemawa Indian School in Keizer in 2009.

"It was an awesome experience," said Weasel.

Weasel said her focus will be the health and well-being of her clients.

"I want to continue to be that strong support for individuals," said Weasel. "It is always rewarding knowing that you're a part of their journey of getting where they need to be or where they want to be. In Indian Country we are all related and I have not only the empathy, but the compassion for those that are coming through the house."

Weasel, who lives in Salem, said she is here to help clients in their recovery.

"Everybody's been through hard times in one way or another and everybody heals in different ways and in different stages," said Weasel. "I'm here to see the good in people and hopefully I can help them."

Kaschmitter said she is pleased with the abilities that Ulery-LaFriniere brings to Behavioral Health.

"She has a significant amount of experience," said Kaschmitter. "She also has a lot of experience with White Bison and Wellbriety. That is huge because that is a culturally based program. We're really excited that she has tons of experience with that and we will have the ability to offer related groups within the community."

White Bison Inc. is an American Indian/Alaskan Native nonprofit charitable organization operating out of Colorado Springs. White Bison offers sobriety, recovery,



Maria Ulery-LaFriniere

addiction prevention and wellness/Wellbriety learning resources to the Native American and Alaskan Native community nationwide.

White Bison is a facilitator of the Wellbriety Movement. Wellbriety means to be sober and well. The "Well" part of Wellbriety is the inspiration to go beyond sobriety and recovery by committing to a life of wellness and healing.

Kateri Coyhis, who took over as White Bison's director of Wellbriety after Ulery-LaFriniere left, said she wished her well in her new position with Grand Ronde.

"Maria has a very big passion for working with Native communities and she has a lot of experience that will help her to be able to assist others in their healing," said Coyhis.

Ulery-LaFriniere said her father taught her Native American spirituality when she was growing up on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota.

"We had a sweat lodge in the back yard," said Ulery-LaFriniere. "That is where I gained most of my connection to Mother Earth."

Despite the large family upbringing and connection to her culture, Ulery-LaFriniere began drinking as a teenager and had issues with substance abuse and domestic violence that shaped her life when she was still young.

Ulery-LaFriniere made her way off of the reservation in her early 20s and graduated from Interstate Business College in Fargo, N.D., in 1996 with an associate degree. She said that she has a wide variety of work experiences from being a deputy court administrator to working in restaurants to being a data collector to now being a chemical dependency counselor.

In 2013, Ulery-LaFriniere earned certifications from Duke University in Durham, N.C., and from The Pacific Institute in Seattle. The

Duke certification was for nonprofit management and the Pacific Institute certification was for thought patterns for high performance.

Along the way she experienced many of life's ups and downs and it was when she was taking a White Bison treatment training that she began to put in place some of those negative experiences and using that progress to repair and complete important relationships in her life that needed her sober attention.

"I had been falling apart on the inside," said Ulery-LaFriniere. "When I started doing the work I found an overwhelming sense of peace I had never known. I learned about thought process and it changed my life. I have been doing it ever since."

"All my experiences that have happened in my life help me to help others. If that hadn't have happened to me I probably wouldn't be as effective."

Ulery-LaFriniere and her husband, Chuck, recently moved to Willamina and she said she couldn't be happier to be working in Grand Ronde for the Tribe.

"I've always wanted to work in Native American communities. I've been doing it for years," said Ulery-LaFriniere. "It has been fulfilling in the fact that there are so many things I can relate to with people and it brings about a trust so that they can go ahead and talk about their own issues. I believe that if you can talk about them, it might be painful at first, but eventually it gets less and less painful the more you talk about stuff. I'm grateful for all the experiences I've had."

Kaschmitter said she likes the idea of Ulery-LaFriniere joining forces with Joe Martineau, the program's current chemical dependency counselor.

"I feel incredibly blessed because our other A and D counselor is Joe Martineau and Joe is also very connected within the community," said Kaschmitter.

Kaschmitter said she thinks having Weasel and Ulery-LaFriniere on board will make the Behavioral Health team more complete and better able to serve clients.

"I think they will be great in terms of fitting in," said Kaschmitter. "We want somebody that we think is going to be able to relate to the people we serve and provide a good service. I hope the community recognizes that we have people that have the life experience that they are going to be able to relate. They understand historical trauma and they understand inter-generational trauma. It's not a cultural shock for them. The wait has very much been worth it." ■

Clothes Closet open Monday, Friday

The Clothes Closet is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday and Friday on the Tribal campus near the Elders Activity Center at the end of Blacktail Drive. It accepts clothes, small appliances, small pieces of furniture, electronics and household goods that are clean and in good condition. It does not accept books, large TVs or large furniture, but there is a community board where people can post those items.

Donations are accepted during regular business hours.

For more information or emergency clothes, contact Lori Walker-Hernandez at 559-847-7565 or Daniele Powley at 503-917-8732. ■