

# ... and not fight about it'

"My way was to get it done and not fight about it," Ed says of his time on Tribal Council. "My idea was to make it work whether it was my idea or somebody else's idea. I think my strongest deal was getting along with people."

Ed is also well known throughout the area for his fashion sense. He sports cowboy hats, leather jackets and big boots in a way that sets him apart from the crowd.

"One of the more recognizable features of the pictures of those early meetings was his hat," Mercier says.

"He always wore those big cowboy hats," says Tribal Chairman Reyn Leno, who grew up across the street from Ed's family in Grand Ronde. "He always just seemed to be saying this is the way I am. Ed always remembered he was a Grand Ronde Indian and that is what made him successful when he was on council. He cared about people. He was really supportive of those issues like veterans and Elders. He was raised here in Grand Ronde when you respected your Elders. People don't do that anymore."

Leno says he spent a lot of time at the Larsen household as a child growing up and that if he wasn't at their house the Larsen children were at his house.

"I've known Ed all my life; as far back as I can remember being a kid," Leno says. "We grew up and we were Grand Ronde. He was the same. He was Grand Ronde Indian. He was willing to tell anyone he was a Grand Ronde Indian. He never was not. He was always very proud of it."

Leno says Ed was a key player in the opening of the Tribe's casino.

"He knew so many people and so many people knew him," Leno says. "He had a clear vision because he grew up here and he knew we didn't have nothing but a cemetery – absolutely nothing."

Ed and his brothers have always been sports fans and Ed played varsity basketball while attending school in Willamina. He still plays



**Tribal Elder Ed Larsen and his wife, Shirley, on their wedding day on Oct. 23, 1976. They were married in Grand Ronde.**

basketball despite the effects of Parkinson's and he went to a Portland Trail Blazers game with his brother Kenny last year.

"I follow the Oregon schools," Ed says. "I'm an Oregon State guy because of Mike, but I pull for Oregon when they are not playing Oregon State."

Ed played in the 1960 Oregon State High School Class A-2 Boys Basketball Tournament at Marshfield High School in Coos Bay.

"We were the dark horses," Ed says. "We took fourth in the league and then won in the district playoffs."

Willamina High finished the 1960-61 season 18-6 after defeating Clatskanie 59-57 in the quarterfinals and then beating Myrtle Point 42-38 to make it to the championship game. The Bulldogs lost to Sherwood's St. Francis Catholic

High School 51-40 in the finals.

"At the high school there was always a picture of Ed in his basketball uniform in the trophy case. I would always go by and say 'That's my cousin Ed,'" says Tribal Elder and former Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. "He was always a protector because he was older. He was really athletic. He was a good basketball player. He was one of the guys we all looked up to and wanted to be like – you know athletic, strong. He had that type of personality that we always wanted to be like him."

Bobb says it was because of people like Ed and Ed's best friend Dave "Punk" Leno that the young guys his age got to be a little more free to be who they wanted to be.

"Those guys were like protectors of us young guys," Bobb says. "That's the way it was for us."

Bobb says one of his favorite memories associated with Ed is when Ed was driving log trucks.

"I don't know how many people remember this but he could do the Tarzan yell," Bobb says. "When he drove past my grandparent's place over here on (Highway) 22 on a summer day, he would do that Tarzan yell out of the window of the truck. I would hear him every time. I'll always remember that it was pretty cool. He did it really good."

Ed and his brother Mike were close and they each dedicated their adult lives to the betterment of the Tribe and its people.

"They lived almost identical lives here," Reyn Leno says of the brothers.

"Mike didn't really have anything bad to say about people. You never heard hardly anyone ever say a bad word about them. And they didn't really say a bad word about anybody."

Leno says Ed was a recognized leader in the Tribe because of how he carried himself.

"Ed was a silent leader," Leno says. "But he was considered a leader because people knew he was a straight-talker. He wasn't going to tell you just what you wanted to hear; he was going to tell you here is what it is and we just need to make it better."

Tribal General Manager Dave Fullerton spends much of his time with Ed these days. They cut wood, stack hay and eat hearty breakfasts on the weekends, and the duo has become a mainstay at the casino on Monday night Elders' dinners.

"Ed is a guy that likes to maintain tradition and keep things alive whether it's a story he tells you or something he says to remind you of what things used to be like around here," Fullerton says. "The Monday night dinner is a way for Ed to repay people for helping him out. He sees real value in returning a favor. I think he sees value in people knowing those stories. Ed is a storyteller. He can tell you exactly what was said from conversations years ago."

Fullerton says he has repeatedly watched Larsen put others' needs before his own.

"One of the things that I would say about Ed is he really values his family," Fullerton says. "He is always putting his family or people in his family before his needs. Always. And I would say that people don't realize about him is that he always goes out of his way to say 'Hi' to all the housekeepers and waitresses and bus people at the casino. The Keno callers, the wait staff – everyone down there knows him because he goes out of his way to say 'Hi' to them and have a conversation with them and ask how they are doing."

Fullerton says he always admired the way Larsen treated Tribal staff.

"He generally just appreciates people," Fullerton says. "He doesn't put numbers in his phone; he just memorizes phone numbers. He remembers people's birthdays. He is one of the council members that when he was on council he truly appreciated the employees at the Tribe. You could ask any long-term employee and they will have a story about Ed Larsen. When I take him to town he is buying chocolate treats for the ladies at the clinic. That's just how he is."

Greene says he knew Larsen was a solid leader when he saw how intently he listened during meetings.

"I think grounded is an excellent word to describe Ed," Greene says. "He was one of those people who knew where he came from and knew his mission was to improve the lives of his people. He maintained that throughout the course of his time on council and the Spirit Mountain board. Ed could carry the message of the Tribe." ■



**A young Ed Larsen imitates his father, Ed Larsen Sr., as a baseball player.**