

'This job is a dream for me'

**LEADER continued
from front page**

Watson was asked if she would take on the role early.

"I had to make a decision fast, but decided to take the plunge," she says.

For some, the thought of leading the 102-year-old Portland City Club with little experience in such a role would be terrifying. For Watson, it's another learning experience and opportunity.

She became involved with the club four years ago at the urging of friend and past club executive director and Portland Mayor Sam Adams. Watson, who had been a member years earlier, joined its board of directors in July 2016 and began as president-elect last March.

"When Sam was executive director, he urged me to re-engage here," Watson says. "I was really interested in the strong voice the club has in Portland. The opinion of the club really matters to people. I became really intrigued by that model of how the club became such a loud voice in the city."

Her re-involvement with the City Club started while Watson and her husband and business partner, Peter Shanky, still owned Cupcake Jones in the Pearl District, a 10-year-old business they built from the ground up. The restaurant and bakery industry can be a revolving door, but with Watson's leadership, she was able to sell it when the time was right to pursue new goals.

"The bakery business is a really hard, physical job," she says. "It is really tiring, seven days a week and always on call. My husband and I haven't had much of a life outside the bakery."

After selling the business, the two took advantage of free flight bene-

fits Shanky receives through his job at American Airlines, and traveled to Mexico, Chicago and California.

In August, she began a new job as director of development and communications for Latino Network in Portland, and at the same time took the position as City Club president.

It seems like a big leap, but Watson says that is was more a series of several small steps. During her tenure at the bakery, she chaired various auctions, community boards and did volunteer fundraising. After the business sold, she took a few months off for serious soul-searching.

"Going into the nonprofit sector seemed like a perfect fit," Watson says. "This job is a dream for me. My day job informs my work at the City Club as well. ... There is a lot of learning involved, but I love it. It's two sides of a coin."

In her position at Latino Network, Watson works on social justice issues focused on programs aimed at educating and empowering Multnomah County Latinos. This helps her as president of the City Club, whose board members are working diligently to include more people of color and women.

"In many ways, the City Club has reflected Portland culture, for good or bad," Watson says. "We are working hard to dismantle past racism. Being the first Native American female president is a great start."

The City Club is a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and research-based civic organization dedicated to community service, public affairs and leadership development, according to its website.

Oregon was at the forefront of many progressive issues in the 1900s, such as the initiative and referendum process, direct election of senators, the commission form of city government, protective labor laws and the minimum wage. In

the autumn of 1916, a small group of men began meeting in the Hazelwood Confectionary & Restaurant in downtown Portland. They were described as "well-educated, eager to foster positive change, and dissatisfied with the operation of the city's public institutions."

Despite the seemingly progressive goals of the club, it remained closed to women until 1973.

"My biggest goal is to get back to the roots of being dissatisfied with the status quo and also working hard to make this club inclusive and reflective of all of Portland," Watson says. "We are working on becoming diverse in age, race, experience, socioeconomic and geographic areas, and education."

This has not been an easy task, and Watson says she finds her biggest challenge in leadership has been the conversations with some of the approximately 1,850 members who see the changes happening in staff and leadership, but are struggling to understand.

"It is possible to reach understanding, and that is exciting, but these are very difficult conversations to have as well," Watson says. "We are literally trying to redirect a ship that has been going down one channel for more than 101 years."

She describes the current 17-member board of directors as diverse in age, experience, race, socioeconomic status and gender.

"It's a good table to sit at," Watson says. "The most rewarding part is working with the staff. This is an organization that draws really dedicated people who love this city and want to make it better. I am inspired by how dedicated they are and how hard they are working for the club."

The daily ins and outs of working with staff and running meetings, all while holding down a "day job," have proven challenging but not

insurmountable for the high-energy Watson.

"I had to research Robert's Rules of Order so I understood how to run the meetings," she says. "I've served on boards, but never chaired anything."

Watson's position as City Club president also includes leading Friday Forum, a weekly lunchtime program that includes topics of interest to Portlanders and Oregonians, and working with staff on strategy and direction for the member-driven club.

"It's a role that lets me be creative and that's what I love about it," Watson says.

Despite the whirlwind past few months, Watson is taking it all in stride. She credits strong women in her life, such as mother Vera Miller, sisters Sandy and Roberta Watson, and aunt Kathryn Harrison, one of the key figures in the Grand Ronde Tribe's Restoration efforts.

"She is an amazing woman and such a survivor," Watson says. "I owe a whole lot of the path I have taken to women like her. I've appreciated having her guidance and perspective on the stuff that is really hard."

Her father, Tribal Elder Robert Jones Watson, is also a big motivator.

"He still lives on his own at 88 and works on his land," she says. "He is so youthful."

For the next year or two, Watson has made a conscious effort not to set specific career goals.

"I love what I am doing, and could do this for years," she says. "I would love to begin and end the process of growing an organization."

She encourages Portland-area Tribal members to get involved in the City Club.

"We're constantly looking for more people of color and need indigenous voices," Watson says. ■

Chinuk Winter Stories Night

We hope you can join us for the evening to have dinner, listen to a traditional story in Chinuk Wawa, and end with singing and dancing. Every family in attendance will receive a copy of the story to take home.

When: Thursday, January 25th at 5:30

Where: Longhouse

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