

Willamina High grad and Tribal spouse joins police force

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

JJ Flynn says he has been intrigued by the idea of a law enforcement career since he was a child visiting his grandfather, Bill Flynn.

“He was a police officer in Warrenton and I remember going to his house, listening to him tell stories and looking at the police gear,” Flynn says. “It really got me interested in law enforcement at a young age.”

The 2010 Willamina High School graduate attended Chemeketa Community College on a baseball scholarship and studied criminal justice. He began working for the Yamhill County Juvenile Detention Center in 2012, supervising teens performing community service.

Flynn moved on to the Federal Detention Center in Sheridan in 2015, where he specialized in riot control, cell extractions and prisoner transport in a housing unit of 120 inmates.

“It was quite a change,” he says. “I went from talking to 13 year olds who were high on drugs to 80-year-old men in walkers.”

When the opportunity came to apply for a position as an officer with the Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department, Flynn says he jumped at the opportunity.

His wife, Justine Flynn, is a Tribal member and works as a K-3 Chinuk Wawa teacher in the Education Department.

“She told me this was her dream



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

JJ Flynn is the Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department’s newest officer. He started on Feb. 5.

job and I knew I needed to find mine as well,” Flynn says. “After doing a ride along with Chief (Jake) McKnight, I knew I had found where I wanted to work. It is different than in big cities and it really feels like you are helping out your community. I grew up here and I want to give back.”

Now, Flynn will have the chance to do just that after being hired as the Tribe’s newest officer in February.

“Before I even started here, I came out for 2.5 hours to introduce myself and meet people,” he

says. “I told my wife I was really excited to come out here and work with these guys. Everyone is really welcoming.”

The Flynn’s live in Willamina, where they recently purchased a house. In his spare time, he also helps coach football, basketball and baseball at Willamina High School.

McKnight says it is helpful to have the Tribe’s newest officer be well-known in the community.

“It’s great,” he says. “JJ really knows the Tribe and its members, and it is easy to plug him into the community. I am looking forward

to him being a part of our team.”

The addition of Flynn brings the number of officers at the department to seven.

Flynn will attend the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training Police Academy in March, which includes 16 weeks of intense learning and physical conditioning.

Flynn says the best and most challenging aspects of his job are the community connections he has made throughout his life.

“The biggest thing for me is people realizing that even though I know them, if they break the law, something is going to happen,” he says. “Just because I know them doesn’t make it OK.”

On the same note, having a good rapport with the community is helpful in doing what can sometimes be a very difficult and challenging job.

“It’s all about having that respect for each other,” Flynn says.

He says he hopes to someday become a sergeant or lieutenant in Grand Ronde.

“It is good to try to achieve something so you don’t remain stagnant in a career,” Flynn says.

He says he is grateful to McKnight and Tribal Council for the opportunity to serve the Tribe.

“I was picked over I don’t know how many other people,” Flynn says. “It’s awesome to have my dream job and I feel very blessed.” ■