

Fulfilling a dream

Tribal member Jared Ripley hired at second largest fire department in U.S.

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

While some spend years trying to choose a career that decision was never an issue for Jared Ripley.

The 26-year-old knew from the time he was a small child that he wanted to be a firefighter, following in the footsteps of father Ron Ripley, who retired from Los Angeles County as a captain, and grandfather Fred Ripley, a retired assistant chief with Lynnwood, Calif.

"It's been a lifelong dream," the newly-minted Los Angeles County firefighter said. "I remember visiting dad at the fire station as far back as I can remember and never had a negative experience. There was great camaraderie and they always had great things to say about dad. ... I also got to go on ride-alongs when they would go out for calls. That was pretty neat to do as a kid."

Los Angeles County is the second largest fire department in the United States with more than 170 stations, only surpassed by New York City's fire department.

Ripley is a Tribal member and son of Tribal Council member Denise Harvey. He grew up in Norco, Calif., until the age of 15 and then moved to Tualatin.

"My mom was already up here working for the Tribe, so I decided I was ready for something different so I tried living up here and it was a great experience," he said.

Ripley spent a summer working for the Tribe's Youth Employment Program, which he credits for giving him the skills to get through the tough fire department application process.

"I honestly feel a lot of the credit goes to the Tribe's youth programs and adult education for helping me be successful," he said. "I am very fortunate to have access to this and I appreciate it."

Harvey said that her son's focus never wavered.

"It was rigorous ... but a chance for Jared to have the job he'd always dreamed of and this was his opportunity," she said. "He remained focused and diligent throughout the process. I'm so proud of him."

According to the Los Angeles County Fire Department website, current selection criteria for firefighters is a six-step process with several standards within each step. These are meeting minimum requirements and certifications, completing an application, an interview, background investigation, review of qualifications, and a medical and psychological evaluation.

Jared Ripley is the first Grand Ronde Tribal member to ever become a firefighter with Los Angeles County. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of father Ron Ripley, left, who retired from Los Angeles County as a captain, and grandfather Fred Ripley, right, a retired assistant chief with Lynnwood, Calif. Here, they are pictured at Jared's graduation from the fire academy in March.



Photo by Danielle Frost

Jared Ripley recently became a Los Angeles County firefighter after a three-year application and testing process. Los Angeles County is the second largest fire department in the United States with more than 170 stations, only surpassed by New York City's fire department. Ripley is a Tribal member and the son of Tribal Council member Denise Harvey.



Photos contributed by Denise Harvey

Ripley graduated from the 16-week cadet academy on Friday, March 30, and started work Sunday, April 1.

it very clear that if I got the offer from L.A., I was going," Ripley said. "But I enjoyed my time there and liked working in a high volume, fast-paced environment."

The road to becoming a firefighter began in January 2015 when Ripley applied and took a two-day written test. A year later, he was contacted for an interview and then submitted information for a detailed background check.

After flying to Los Angeles in March 2017 to meet with the investigator in person, then came a medical evaluation and being fitted for gear. In November 2017, Ripley finally received the e-mail he had been waiting so long to receive: He had been accepted into the cadet academy.

He graduated from the 16-week academy on Friday, March 30, and started work Sunday, April 1, as a probationary firefighter. His mother, father and grandfather attended



at the ceremony.

In the beginning of their careers, firefighters are assigned to stations within the county that have the greatest need. For Ripley, that means a 200-mile round trip commute from his home in Newport Beach to a small station in Pear Blossom.

"You are the new guy and you don't know the crew and what their expectations are. ... I tried to be ready for whatever and so far it has been a great experience," he said. "Most of the guys have been there for 30 years or more and they're always there to answer questions and want to help me be successful."

There are approximately 175 fire stations within Los Angeles County and Ripley jokes that his new one is also the farthest away from home.

"It is very interesting because I live near the beach and work near the mountains and the desert," he said. "There are busy highways and with that the potential for car accidents, wildland fires and brush fires. ... You are isolated and there is a lot of responsibility for you. It is a great experience because you know you really need to be dialed in on what you do."

Ripley's favorite part of his job is being out in the field.

"I'm finally here and made it where I want to be," he said. "I have an opportunity to go to work every day and know I will have a great experience going into the station each day. ... You are here to help others and to be a part of the community."

Ripley also enjoys how every day is different as a firefighter at Station 79.

"It's very unpredictable and I am never bored," Ripley said.

The most challenging part of the process has been keeping up-to-date with all of the requirements of becoming a firefighter.

"Trying to plan and coordinate everything living and working (in Oregon) was difficult," he said. "There were literally days when I would work, fly to California for the day, fly home and work the next day. I had to be ready to leave at the drop of a hat."

In his downtime, Ripley enjoys snowboarding, working out and attending sporting events, especially college football games. He plans to take up surfing when time permits.

"Right now, I am just trying to adjust to my new life," he said. "You have a lot of different things going on during your probationary period and my focus is keeping up on that, resting when I can and staying in shape."

After six months, Ripley will be moved to a different station and after a year his probationary period will be over and he can choose to stay where he is at or go elsewhere.

"So far, the guys I work with have been nothing but helpful," he said. "It has been a really great experience." ■