

New TERO director praises progressive program

Steve Campos served in similar role for Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

It's been a whirlwind few weeks for Grand Ronde's new Tribal Employment Rights Office Director Steve Campos.

He drove approximately 2,200 miles from Oklahoma to Oregon during the week of June 17 and then began working for the Tribe Monday, June 25.

His 2,200-mile road trip included the plains of Oklahoma and Kansas to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, Yellowstone Park and then the Oregon Coast.

This type of schedule would sound exhausting to most but Campos, 45, who spent 14 years climbing the ladder of high-pressure corporate America sales, takes it all in stride.

"I'm a West Coast guy so it is great to be back here," Campos said while unpacking his new office. "This job is an opportunity to do something I wanted to expand on and I'm excited about that."

Campos has a bachelor of science degree in business management from the University of Phoenix, which he earned while working full time with three children at home.

"It was pretty rough getting that degree," he said. "The kids would be in bed Sunday night for school the next day, and I literally wouldn't see them until Wednesday night."

But he knew having a degree was an important piece of furthering his career. It eventually led Campos to serve as TERO director for his Tribe, the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, for four years to help other Tribal members better themselves.

During his time as TERO director, Campos brought the Pawnee program from a deficit of more than \$185,000 to a profit-generating enterprise. Those proceeds were used

to fund small Tribal businesses.

He described the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's TERO program as very "progressive" in nature due to its memorandum of understanding with the Oregon Department of Transportation.

"Oklahoma is not there yet," Campos said. "The TERO programs there need a coalition that will blanket all of them like in Oregon. This is a real progressive program, and as young as it is, with lots of traction and much has been accomplished."

Campos said he would like to take Grand Ronde's TERO program to the next level.

"I want it to be recognized as the TERO of the year by the Council for Tribal Employment Rights," he said.

The award encompasses several factors, such as how many people were put to work, how much money was made and the different certifications employees receive.

"I am also trying to open the opportunity in other industries besides construction," Campos said. "I would like to see TERO start Tribal businesses to generate revenue and opportunities for the Tribe."

The Grand Ronde Tribe enacted its TERO ordinance in November 2013 to promote the interests of self-governance and ensure that Indian people can participate in economic opportunities on and near the Reservation. The opportunities



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Steve Campos is the Tribe's new Tribal Employment Rights Office director. He started on Monday, June 25, and was previously the TERO director for his Tribe, the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma.

include job preparation and training, and Tribal contracting and subcontracting.

The ordinance requires all employers, including Tribal government, Tribal businesses and contractors who perform work on the Reservation, to provide Grand Ronde Tribal and Indian preference in employment, and Indian preference in contracting and subcontracting.

Campos' moved from California to Oklahoma four years ago after years spent working for Xerox and Canon. When he learned the job in Grand Ronde was open, he decided it was time to pursue new opportunities.

"I've just been really taken back by the kindness of the employees and the beauty of the surrounding Grand Ronde area," he said. "For a small and fairly young Tribe, they are doing more than longtime established Tribes."

Campos was born in Los Angeles and grew up in San Diego, so being in proximity to the beach is appealing, although surfing in Oregon's cold waters is not as much so.

"My brother lives in Kauai so that is my vacation spot," he said.

In addition to surfing, other hobbies include fishing, disc golfing, "regular" golfing and hunting.

He has three children: Sashay, 19, DiEtte, 18, and Kimowen, 14.

After introducing himself at the Tribal Council meeting on Wednesday, June 27, Campos was asked by Vice Chair Chris Mercier how to say "Go Ducks" in Pawnee.

A search of the Pawnee dictionary

did not turn up any ducks, so Campos said he was going to need to call on the experts before answering that question.

He noted that his Indian name is Kuruks Ruhurlrahat, which means "Bear taking care of his own." It was given to him in a Tribal ceremony five years ago.

Now that Campos is at the helm, former Interim TERO Director John Mercier will return to his regular job as the Tribe's Public Works coordinator, developing and maintaining the public infrastructure with most duties transportation focused.

"I am very pleased and excited to have Steve taking on the position of TERO director," Mercier said. "He has a varied career background in private industry with the last four years of his career working directly in TERO. He will become a well-rounded addition to the TERO team."

Mercier said that Campos will be very busy.

"He has a lot of work to do, probably more than most new TERO directors, and he is taking on all this work with enthusiasm and dedication to Tribal employment," Mercier said. "I told Steve this is a great place to work, and employees like to stay for a long time. I hope he is one of those employees."

In a staffwide e-mail sent Friday, June 29, Mercier also thanked fellow TERO employees for making his two-year stint as interim director easier.

"Steve joins a great team in the TERO program," he said. "I thank Steve for joining us, and I want to thank Duke Kimsey, Lori Sterling and Keri Kimsey for their hard work and support as I was part of their team for the past two years." ■

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