

Behavioral Health hires new employees

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

Behavioral Health is adding more than new building space to assist the Grand Ronde community. The department also has hired two new therapists to better serve the membership.

Sergio Gutierrez is a contracted employee who will work in Grand Ronde one day a week as a chemical dependency counselor. He also is certified in treating gambling addictions.

Jeff Versaw is a full-time child and adolescent therapist, specializing in helping children ages birth to 17.

Sergio Gutierrez

Gutierrez, 56, was born and raised in Mexico, immigrating to the United States after high school. He found work in a Pasadena, Calif., hospital, which spurred an interest in a social work career.



Sergio Gutierrez

“Being in a hospital, working with patients gave me the interest,” he said.

In 1997, he was hired to work

in addiction services and given the opportunity to also become certified as a chemical dependency counselor through a program offered by the state of Oregon. As a bilingual speaker, his services were in demand.

“New Step Behavioral Health hired me as a full-time counselor because the state had a need for multicultural counselors,” he said.

After more than two years of on-the-job training and classes, Gutierrez earned his degree.

“After that I started working more and getting focused on providing services,” Gutierrez said.

He worked for Catholic Community Services-based New Step treatment center until 2008. Then Gutierrez began working for Polk County, where he is still employed today. He contracts one day a week with the Tribe.

“I work four 10-hour shifts at my job and have three days off every week,” he said “I always have been interested in working with the Native community so this was a good fit. I also really enjoy being in rural areas.”

At his Polk County job, Gutierrez primarily works with Hispanic clients from Mexico who have been cited for driving under the influence.

“My vision was to work more with medication-assisted detox, which Grand Ronde is pursuing,” he said. “I totally agree that addiction is a disease and along with other diseases that people get medication for, we need to view it the same and get rid of the stigma.”

Gutierrez is also certified in treating gambling addictions.

Health & Wellness Quality Improvement Manager Dawn Doar said including problem gambling services to Behavioral Health is an opportunity to help the membership in another capacity.

“This service will combine prevention, harm reduction and multiple levels of treatment focusing on quality-of-life issues for gamblers, their families and the community,” she said. “Sergio is versatile in his knowledge and is ready to help in any way.”

Gutierrez’s said his goal these first few months is to learn more about the culture in Grand Ronde and become a part of the community.

“I don’t plan to quit,” Gutierrez said. “This is a great opportunity and I feel blessed.”

Jeff Versaw

Versaw, 63, is no stranger to working with Tribal people. He spent 19 years employed in behavioral health for the Jicarilla Apache Nation in Dulce, N.M. After his



Jeff Versaw

wife Nancy retired from her job with the Nation, the couple decided to move to Oregon to be closer to

their adult daughter, Claire.

They settled in West Salem as going from a town of 3,000 with no stoplights to the hustle and bustle of Portland was a bit overwhelming, Versaw added.

“When my wife retired from the Tribe, we had to move out of housing so packing up and heading here was an easy decision,” he said.

Versaw began working full-time for Grand Ronde on June 24. Since he spent the last three years of his career as a Behavioral Health Department administrator, he is happy to return to his primary field of interest — infant and child mental health.

“I do parent psychotherapy with families with children ages birth to 5, and I also see kids up to 17 years old,” he said. “I love working with people and the ability to help them find a voice and make the changes they want to make.”

Living in West Salem instead of on the Reservation is a change for Versaw, but he is hoping to attend different community events in Grand Ronde and make connections.

“It really helps to build rapport,” he said. “You’re not just coming in to work during the day Monday to Friday.”

Doar said Versaw’s skills will strengthen Tribal services to help children and adolescents.

“Jeff has the experience and the skills to continue with moving us forward with being able to provide the methods and techniques that will help our youth thrive,” she said. “We are looking forward to helping this service grow and Jeff is excited to get started.” ■

St. Michael’s offers brunch

St. Michael’s Catholic Church offers an open house brunch every Sunday following Mass. The brunch is free to the community. Brunch begins at about 11:30 a.m. following the 10:30 a.m. Mass.

Mass attendance is not required for brunch attendance. For more information or for kitchen and hall rental, contact Janelle Justen at 503-550-0923. ■

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Contact Dana Ainam for any questions at
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MISSING

Missing And Taken Indigenous People

Leneisha "Eko" Whitefeather

Portland OR

Missing 7-8-19

Age 21

Brown Hair
Brown Eyes
5' 2" Tall
150 lbs

Large birthmark on left hand
Grand Ronde Tribal Member

Leneisha has no vehicle. She had previously been living in the downtown Olympia WA area

If seen, or you know where she might be, call
Portland PD (503) 823-3333. Case# 19-229596
or make an anonymous tip to
Oregon Crime Stoppers (503) 823-4357
or the toll free national line 1-800-222-8477

Source: Portland PD (7-8-19)