

West Valley Visioning prepares to launch new phase soon

By Christine Talley

Special to Smoke Signals

After a year and a half of surveying the community and hosting town hall dinners, the West Valley Visioning Project is announcing that it has launched the next phase of its project.

During this phase, with the support of the Ford Family Foundation and other partners, the project plans to contract with a consulting firm to help develop a collective vision for the West Valley and create a strategic plan that will ensure the successful implementation of the vision.

The plan will outline and prioritize each of the projects as defined by the community. In addition, this vision and plan will drive grant-writing efforts as the community seeks funding for each of the projects.

The current mission is to gather citizen-based ideas to chart a strong future for where West Valley residents live, work and play. The project thanks all of the community members who've participated in the survey and town hall dinners. We can celebrate the success of the past year and use it to chart our future. This project has provided a tremendous opportunity to engage with the community. As we create the strategic plan, we will continue to engage the community in a variety of meaningful and creative ways.

There's no denying that the coronavirus pandemic has given us a

new context in which we can safely participate in the world. It has, likely, imposed a new perspective on people's world view, causing each of us to re-evaluate our priorities. New circumstances may cause us to revisit what we wish for our community. These new priorities and wishes are important information that will be incorporated into discussions and data during this new phase of the West Valley Visioning Project.

We are excited to announce that our second annual photo contest is open. We are hopeful that we will be able to come together to see and vote on the photos in person before the year is out. If we are unable to do so, our plan is to host the photo contest entirely online. In addition, we are planning an outdoor celebration for the West Valley community that will include food, fun and music to be held after the threat of the coronavirus has passed.

We'd like to thank all those in the community who have participated in and supported our visioning project. We look forward to getting together with you once the pandemic has passed to celebrate, debrief and set our priorities for the future.

You can find out more about the photo contest at wvproject.org/photocontest. Sign up for our mailing list at wvproject.org/maillinglist for updates about upcoming events. You can also follow us on [Facebook.com/wvproject](https://www.facebook.com/wvproject). ■

Job will assist veterans to obtain benefits

VETERANS continued from front page

services. The new position was created at the behest of Tribal leaders who have long advocated for local services to help other Tribal veterans navigate their federal benefits.

In 2019, the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 5598, which provided funds for each of the nine Tribes to have its own Veterans' Services Officer. The purpose of these funds was for Tribes to "expand and enhance their programs and services."

In March 2020, Tribal Council approved a memorandum of understanding with the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs to provide training and accreditation for the job. The state will provide \$25,000 annually toward the new position.

Former Tribal Council Chair and Marine Corps veteran Reyn Leno has long been an advocate of a Grand Ronde-based position.

"It has always been difficult to get care for our veterans," he said. "A lot of older veterans like my dad, who served in World War II, it was really hard to get them to go to Portland or Vancouver Veterans Affairs offices. It's important for Tribes to have their own Veterans' Services Officer."

"Also, a lot of our Native American veterans really rely on their families to help them access services, so this will really help them. It's a more comfortable feeling to have this service locally, and takes some of the burden off of the VA. It's a different level of service when a Tribal member can come right in here and it will help them feel more comfortable."

Social Services Department Manager Dana Ainam said Quenelle's combination of military service and experience of working with veterans is a good fit for the new role.

"We are so excited to add this program to our Social Services team," Ainam said. "We will now be able to have a dedicated staff member to build relationships and knowledge to better serve our Tribal veterans and assure that they receive the benefits and support that is deserved."

"Ramona Quenelle ... brings the presence of positivity and passion to her work. Her vision and excitement to develop this program, learn and build community will serve us well. We look forward to identifying our veterans and learning how we can meet their needs."

Quenelle's first goal as the Veterans' Services Officer will be to attain accreditation, which takes approximately 12 months and 1,000 hours of working with veterans. She began her first week of training July 6.

"What I didn't anticipate about

this job is that my unique background of military service, health care, education and criminal justice work would all come together to prepare me for this," she said. "Every single thing I have ever done in these fields will really benefit me in this position."

The primary function of Quenelle's job is to assist veterans and their families by obtaining the benefits they are entitled to through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"I will help guide them and gather the proper documentation needed to obtain benefits," Quenelle said. "I feel like I will be the person who helps unlock the puzzle. This is how I envision that job."

Quenelle is the third Tribal Veterans' Services Officer in Oregon. The other two are at the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

Another goal during Quenelle's first year will be to identify Tribal veterans needing services, connect with them and tailor the program to their needs.

"We have a cultural aspect that is unique in a veterans' program," she said. "There is a lot of research and work we are doing."

Quenelle, 40, is an enrolled member of the Pit River Tribe (Madesi Band) and grew up at the Roaring Creek Rancheria Reservation near Redding, Calif.

She served in the Navy from 1999 to 2003 on active duty in South Korea and Japan and deployed two years on the USS Blue Ridge in the Asian Pacific. Quenelle was an active reservist from 2003 to 2006.

She has an associate degree in general business from Shasta Community College, a bachelor's degree in criminal justice (summa cum laude) from Colorado Technical University and a master's degree in human behavior from National University.

She has worked for the Grand Ronde Tribe since October 2018 as the Tribal Court Programs coordinator. Before that, Quenelle was employed at Shasta Community College for four years in the president's office and student services, where she worked with students who were veterans and helped create a service center focused on helping them be successful in college.

She is married to Anthony Quenelle and they have six children, Koosah (17), Corina (17), Alliyah (13), Marie (9), Leloo (7) and Ulali (4).

In her spare time, Quenelle enjoys attending powwows, dancing, sewing, running, drawing, reading and spending time with her family.

"I'm so excited and proud to call myself a Tribal Veterans' Services Officer," she said. ■



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