

In honor of Joylyn Cornelius – 10/25/23

By Tracy Christensen

It's a privilege and honor to be here today as we celebrate Ms. Joylyn Cornelius and recognize her for her for 50 years of service in education for the Oneida Nation.

Please allow me a few minutes of your time to take you on a journey of Joylyn's amazing career as we go back a little more than 50 years ago to September 1973. This is when Joylyn applied and was hired as a co-teacher for the Oneida Head Start program. She began her teaching career for Oneida in two classrooms at the old H building on Fish Creek Road.

In the 1970s, she was fortunate and honored to have been taught the Oneida language from the Native Oneida fluent speakers at this time. During the beginning years of her teaching career, she was holding her teaching job, going to school and being a mom. When her son became school age, she really began to further her education by taking classes with the goal to earn her teaching degree.

In the 1980's Head Start moved to the basement of the Norbert Hill Center below the gym. By this time, Joylyn had worked herself up the ladder to be a Lead Teacher. Next came a move to the first floor of the Norbert Hill Center. There she was the Lead Teacher for the older 4-year-olds getting ready to enter kindergarten the following year.

A precious memory that Joylyn recalls is the year that she had 2 sets of twins in her classroom. Can you imagine? Luckily, they weren't identical.

Joylyn was very serious about teaching the Oneida Language to her students. With the help of Native Speakers, she learned the simple Oneida Language Opening. The students would say the opening every morning to start their day. They would also say their "giving thanks" words before they ate their lunch. At this stage of her career, Joylyn was required to continue taking college level classes. She began to really enjoy learning about the growth and development of early childhood.

In 1990 there was an invitation to join the Menominee and Oneida co-sponsored Native group that partnered with St. Norbert college to pursue a degree in education. The goal was to have more Native teachers. Only 10 people from each tribe was selected to attend the full scholarship program at St. Norbert College. Joylyn considered herself very fortunate to be one of those individuals.

The Head Start program worked around her college courses so that she was able to continue to teach while she advanced toward her degree. In 1995 Joylyn obtained her K-8 Teaching Degree with a minor in Early Childhood from St. Norbert College. Today there are 3 teachers that graduated from that program teaching at the Turtle School.

Joylyn was soon celebrating 25 years of service for the Head Start program. Then a 2nd grade teaching position opened at Oneida Nation Elementary. It was a difficult decision for her to leave the Head Start Program, but she felt it was time to move forward and try teaching at a new grade level. She also could not resist the opportunity to work with her sister. She applied, got the 2nd grade teaching job, and ended up working right next door to her sister! That was AMAZING!

She discovered that she loved teaching 2nd grade and taught at that level for five years. During this time, she was offered an opportunity to attend an outreach Master's program from Lesley College in Massachusetts. It was an accelerated, Curriculum Development program, one weekend a month for 18 months. It was perfect for Joylyn. Her sister was influential in her decision to enroll in the Master's program. The fact that her youngest child was now 10 made the decision easier for her. In 1997 Joylyn earned a Master's degree in Curriculum Development through the Arts from Lesley College.

Due to a change in administration, Joylyn was transferred from 2nd grade to teach kindergarten. She remembers her first kindergarten class as being mostly boys. While it wasn't a change she chose, they had a blast learning that year.

Joylyn was a member of the first class to participate in the Graduate Advanced Program at the University of Wisconsin in Oshkosh. While attending Thursday evenings after school, she earned 18 credits and completed an oral presentation assessment which was required by the program. She developed a portfolio and presented her research and experiences teaching. It was stressful and a lot of work, but she had a core group of teacher friends that helped and supported her during this time. She did it! In 2005 Joylyn added to her list of accomplishments a 316 Reading License from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

In 2017, Joylyn transferred to the Reading Specialist position. She is currently a reading teacher for kindergarten and first grade. She loves teaching reading skills to the younger students. Her heart has always been with teaching the younger children. When the “light bulb” comes on, there is no other reward needed than the look on their faces. Joylyn loves her room and the opportunity to meet, greet, and hug her students each day.

Joylyn has an impressive list of accomplishments. She is very proud to have worked with the Fluent Native Oneida Language Speakers to co-author the *As It Happens* curriculum. She has been trained in *Soar to Success* curriculum, Basic Early Literacy and Tribes. Joylyn has held the position of Book Fair Chairperson, Culture Days Presenter, and Member of the Wisconsin Reading Association.

I’ve had the privilege to work with this amazing and compassionate person for the past 25 years. I have seen the excited looks on her students’ faces as she escorts them to her room to learn something new. I have witnessed students of all ages swarm around her in the cafeteria to get their hug and share a highlight of their day with her. I have listened to them sing together. Joylyn has a huge heart that has positively impacted the lives of not only her students and their families, but the staff that have been fortunate to work with her since the beginning of her career.

Congratulations, Jolynn, on your incredible milestone of 50 years of service for the Oneida Nation! We are grateful for you and your dedication as you continue to work with our staff, students and families in the Oneida Nation School System.