

College credit certificate program held at casino

By Babette Herrmann
TODAY CORRESPONDENT

OLYMPIA, Wash. — One of the greatest advantages to entering a career in gaming and hospitality is the amount of room for advancement.

For example, some great blackjack dealers will make the transition to floor supervisors, and have the opportunity to advance into even higher positions within their department.

As these employees advance, so does their need to acquire detailed management training.

Sandy Crowell, training manager for Nisqually Red Wind Casino, has a strong desire to see new managers succeed and retain them as employees.

Crowell said that in-house training was effective to a certain extent; but for upward-bound employees, she visualized that a longer, more extensive training

program would inspire managers to retain and utilize this knowledge indefinitely.

Instead of encouraging new managers to take college courses, she looked into bringing college to the casino in order to make it convenient for employees to attend class and encourage them to complete the program.

With the tribe's support, she started examining possibilities and liked what Tacoma Community College had to offer. She collaborated with Lisa Edwards, dean of enterprise and economic development, to discuss the curriculum and timeline for students to earn a Tribal Enterprise Gaming Certificate.

"I always had this goal to be able to offer some kind of management training with on-site college credits," Crowell said.

Meanwhile, she met with directors from different departments at the casino to find out what skills they would like their managers to learn.

From there, TCC devised the curriculum requirements and the task of finding qualified instructors for each module. The planning began in May 2007 and the program was ready to launch last October — a quick formation to a process that would normally take a year or longer. "Red Wind's support has been the whole reason for our success," Edwards said.

The 14-credit program will take students one year to complete. The course is divided into seven classes that are two credits each and seven weeks long. Students can transfer those credits toward a business degree at TCC or to another two- or four-year college

in Washington state.

TCC has hired mostly Native instructors with an extensive background in the subject that they teach.

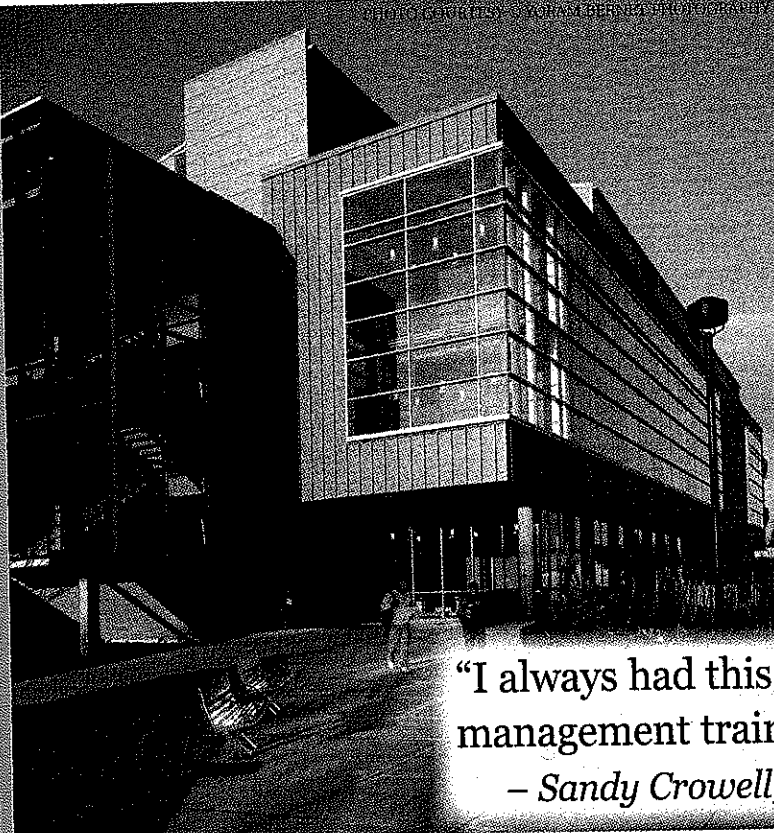
"We have worked hard to ensure that the instructors are Native, and if they are not Native that they have extensive experience working in tribal casinos," Edwards said. She noted that instructors are given an outline of topics that they are required to cover and they choose their own materials. "They have the freedom to put together what they want."

Students attend class for three hours one day per week. And Red Wind has welcomed a few other students from neighboring casinos. "They learn these management skills, and they encourage other people to stay because they are better managers," Crowell said.

The first cohort of about 21 students launched in January, and the second began in June. A few students from two neighboring gaming establishments attend classes.

Jane Wood, Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota, teaches the first class in the module "Supervisory Essentials & Front Line Leadership." She is the president of Oyate Training & Research, a company that provides training, research and consulting services for tribal and Native organizations in the south Puget Sound region.

When Wood introduced her training material to TCC, she was pleased to hear it was what the college had in mind for the inaugural class. "I just walked in the door with my curriculum and they said this is exactly what we



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— Sandy Crowell, Nisqually Red Wind Casino training manager

RED WIND CASINO

AT NISQUALLY

PHOTO COURTESY TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

wanted," she said. "It was almost like it was meant to be."

Her curriculum covers effective supervision, communication, how to delegate, appropriate feedback, performance evaluations, ethics and resolving conflicts. She enjoys the ethnic diversity of the classes, in addition to seeing students work with managers from all areas of the casino.

"Food services rarely get to talk to accountants, who rarely get to talk to security," she said. "But they all have common issues about supervision, building budgets and about planning, so it was really important for students to be able to talk across organizational lines."

Students have told her that they've already applied skills learned in the class on the job. "You're actually learning practical skills that you are going to use on the job right away."

Student Jillian McCloud, Nisqually, was recently promoted from interim assistant casino manager to assistant casino manager in June. Her career at Red Wind began straight out of high school. Even as a tribal member, she had to work up the ranks. She started working in the pull-tab section of the casino before moving to table games six months later.

Over the years, McCloud has engaged herself in a variety of management training programs, and recently earned her certificate in casino gaming through an online program offered by San Diego State University.

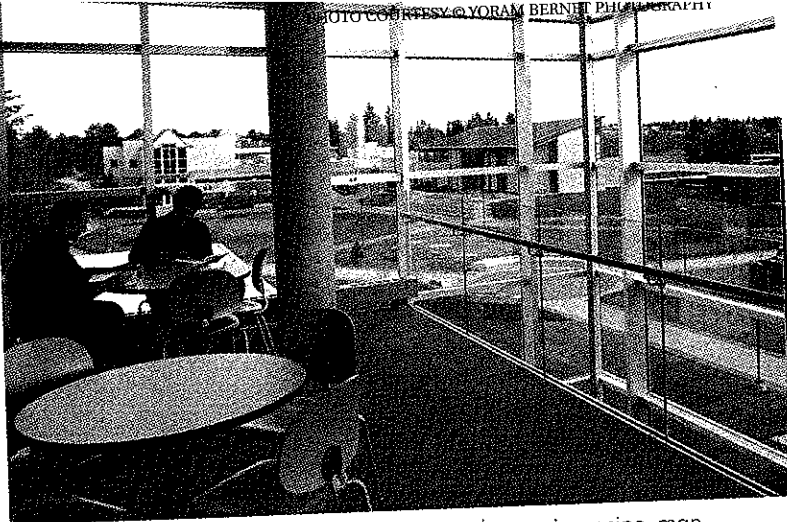
As assistant casino manager, she oversees table games, slots and Keno. So far, the program has given her a further understanding of casino finance and

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marketing. McCloud said she feels camaraderie with the other managers in her class that she would not normally experience in her daily job.

"It has given me a better outlook on how everyone else runs their department," she said. "I get suggestions from them on how they handle their employees."

For a college credit program, the price is definitely right. Students pay only \$100, and that includes books, materials and the full use of the TCC campus.



Edwards said that if students had to pay out of pocket for this highly specialized program it would cost about \$450 per module, not including books.

Crowell said that the program has been a dream come true for students wanting to get a jump-start on a college degree. "People can visualize what they can do after this, and that it's not impossible."

If a student chooses to transfer to TCC, the credits fall best in line with a business degree. The college is currently entertaining a

two-year degree in casino management, Edwards said.

In the fall of 2008, Suquamish Clearwater Casino Resort will debut its gaming certificate program. TCC is partnering with Olympic Community College in Poulsbo. Edwards said that the college would like to expand the program regionally and, eventually, nationwide.

For more information on the program, contact Edwards at (253) 566-5019 or ledwards@tacomacc.edu.

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