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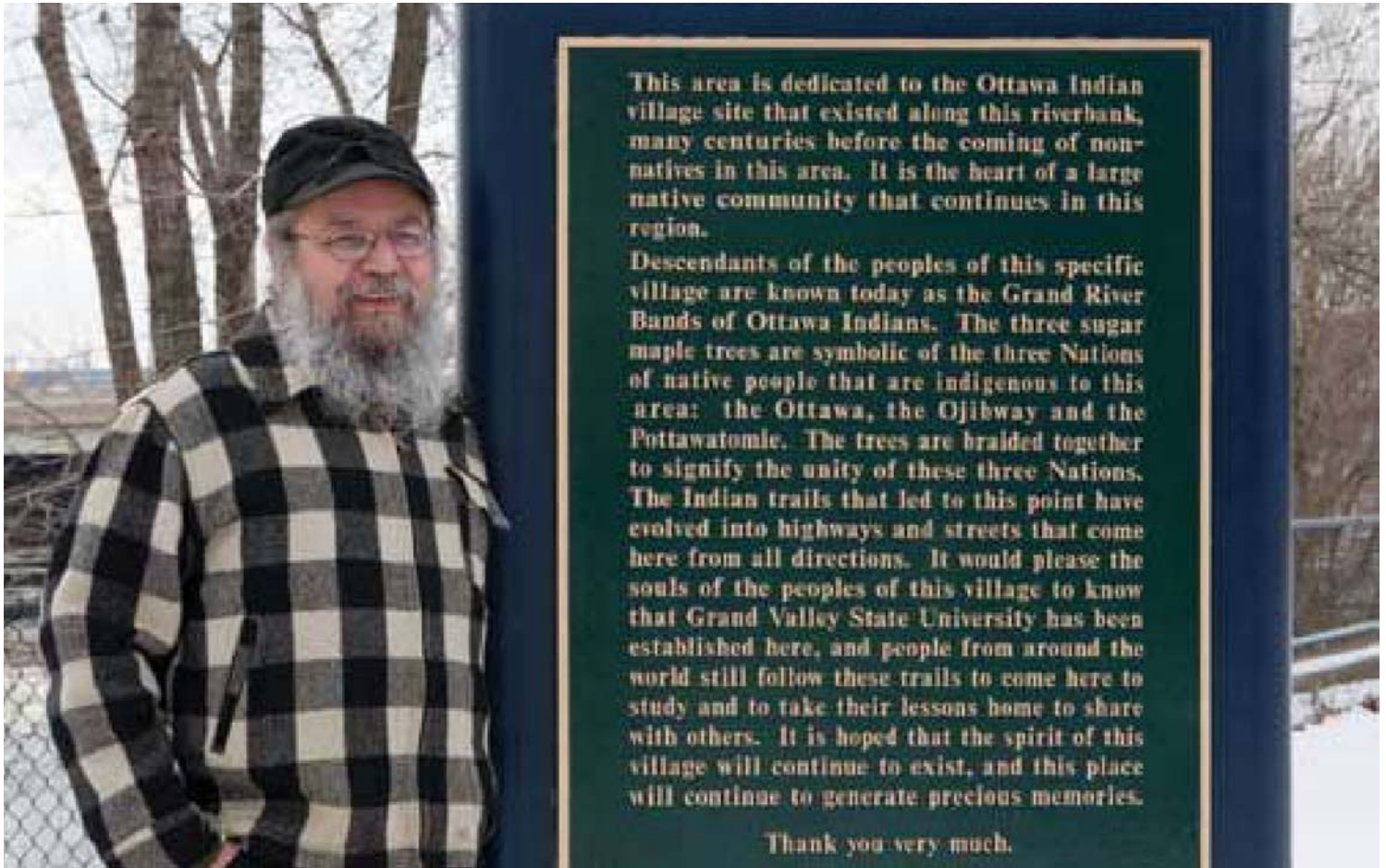
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ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS

Ron Yob: The Importance of Heritage and Higher Education

By Dottie Barnes



Ron Yob is a familiar name to many in West Michigan. He taught in the Grand Rapids Public School system for 30 years, but gained notoriety as tribal chairman of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, a position he has held for 15 years.

Yob has strong ties to Grand Rapids. In 1855, his great-great-great-great-grandfather, Maish-ke-aw-she, signed the Treaty of Detroit, which relocated the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians. Yob is the author of the wording written on a plaque at Ba-Wa-Ting Park, across from the Eberhard Center. The plaque serves as a state historical marker, honoring the Grand River Ottawa tribe.

Yob attributes his accomplishments in life to the good education he received while growing up in West Michigan. "I went through parochial school and graduated from high school, which put me ahead of many of the other kids who were Native American," he said.

Yob began working with high-risk Native American students in the Grand Rapids Public School system when he was in his early 20s. By age 29, he felt compelled to get his teaching degree.

"I enrolled at Grand Valley in 1977 and was the first to receive the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver at Grand Valley," said Yob. "I was teaching kids at all levels and I wanted to take advantage of the wide variety of courses at Grand Valley."

He took classes that would expand his knowledge and help him meet the needs of his Native American students. These included environmental science, botany, pottery, physics and water studies. He graduated from Grand Valley in 1980.

Yob is known for having a good rapport with his students. He said that is partly because his students are taught to respect their elders. "I grew up in the same neighborhood as my students," he said. "I held the majority

of them when they were babies; we attended the same gatherings. My students knew that if they messed up, I would be visiting their homes. I worked hard to create an environment they were comfortable in."

Yob has seen several of his students go on to college; five graduated from Grand Valley. And, while retired, Yob continues to teach Indian history at Aquinas College and coordinates several events in his role as tribal chairman. He is in charge of the annual Pow Wow in Grand Rapids which draws some 30,000 people, and he coordinates an annual duck race for Native American children who all receive prizes at the event, including several boys and girls who win bicycles.

Yob has testified several times before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in an effort to have the GRBOI recognized as a federal Indian tribe. This would make the tribe eligible for federal funding and programs. 🍀