



FRONTIER CENTRE
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Profile Series

Profile of:

TERRIE BRIGHAM

"We had to deal with the reality of running a business both on and off the reservation,"

For Native American entrepreneur Terrie Brigham, 46, commercial fishing is not just a business venture, but has defined her family and tribe for generations.

When she and her family set up Brigham Fish Market in Cascade Locks, Oregon, it was just a continuation and expansion of what they had been doing all their lives. The Brigham family opened their fish shop location, where Terrie is now manager, in February 2014 and it has been going strong ever since.



"We've always lived on this river. I grew up on the Columbia," said Brigham, referring to the river system that has been the lifeblood of her family and their Oregon Native American community. The Columbia River is the largest river in the Pacific Northwest region of North America; its famous gorge is home to some of the best windsurfing in the world.

Brigham's family is from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). The reservation is a union of three tribes -- the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla

Walla -- and has over 3,100 tribal members. Nearly half of those members live on or near the Umatilla Reservation. The cultural traditions of the community are wrapped up in fishing, both for ceremonial purposes and for food.

Brigham's father was on and off the reservation throughout the life, whereas her mother grew up there.

Brigham said she has been fishing since she was eight years old, as did her siblings and the rest of her family. Her father also started fishing around eight years of age.

"My parents, my aunts and uncles, we all fished. It was all we knew. It wasn't considered a job. We just fished. Farmers farm, we fished," she said.

Terrie Brigham started her education after high school with an eye towards tourism. After earning an associate's degree in hotel tourism at Blue Mountain College, she eventually transferred to Eastern Oregon University to study business administration, with a focus on gaming and tourism. She did not complete the program and eventually went into building the family business.

"I am actually about 30 credits shy of that degree," she said.

For the Brighams and other members of the tribe fishing the river, the spring fishing season starts around March. The fall season runs until around November. The summer months of June and July are

the peak time for catching Steelhead, Sockeye, Coho and Chinook.

However, it was when the government opened the Columbia River for commercial fishing during the summer that the Brigham family began to seriously consider setting up the fish market business. Brigham Fishing Market deals in all aspects of the tribal fishery business—from harvesting the fish, to processing them, to selling fish to the public. Terrie's sister Kim Brigham Campbell runs the fish market's operations while also doing net fishing herself. Between the fishing operation, the boats and the crews, the market really is a whole-family venture.

Finding the initial capital to finance the venture at the start was the toughest obstacle they had to overcome. Members of the family used their personal savings on the business and Brigham said her brother used his 401k retirement savings plan to invest in the business.

"The whole family contributed. They really did," said Brigham.

Brigham, however, credits a local economic development district loan with helping to set the business up. She also found wide support for their venture from the local community and the reservation.

Brigham said the growth of the business over the years can be attributed to Cascade Lock as a tourist destination. Visitors from all over come to the region to hike, fish, or

just explore the nearby waters. The community also claims the distinction of being the windsurfing capital of the world.



The fishing market's busy season is from June to September. They already had a pre-existing clientele when they were selling fish in the past. Now, they have just added the tourist market to expand their sales.

Brigham said the local tribal government has been supportive to Indigenous entrepreneurial initiative through the setting up of business seminars for tribal members. There are classes on finances, as well as writing an effective business plan. Brigham said when setting up their business they had to learn many things, "the hard way." For example, as a tribal venture, they had to learn what was taxable and what was not taxable in their business, given the exemptions available on

Native American ventures. They had to hire an accountant to deal with these issues.

“We had to deal with the reality of running a business both on and off the reservation,” she said.

For aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs, Brigham said that they must learn the realities of business, including the possibility of failure. That is where a strong and realistic business plan comes into play, she said.

“I was told by other business people that if you can survive for two years, you are good to go. However, I have come to not believe that. I think it is maybe four to five years,” she said, with a laugh.

So, she insists that tribal governments keep doing these kinds of business seminars for budding entrepreneurs and business leaders.

A strong business plan, she said, helps you realize the reality of the market you are in. As an example, she pointed to some businesses that think they can add a coffee shop to their venture without really thinking through whether there is a good market and the necessary business traffic to sustain that operation.

Finally, she cautions those starting out in business not to be enticed by the idea of starting a big operation. Starting a smaller, more realistic operation would be best.

“You have to really learn what you are getting yourself into,” she said.

The Brigham Fish Market has received recognition along the way, including an award just last year. The business was awarded the 2017 Entrepreneur of the Year Award by the Wildhorse Business Development Services (WBDS) during a luncheon ceremony in June 2017.



The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is an independent, non-profit organization that undertakes research and education in support of economic growth and social outcomes that will enhance the quality of life in our communities. Through a variety of publications and public forums, Frontier explores policy innovations required to make the prairie region a winner in the open economy. It also provides new insights into solving important issues facing our cities, towns and provinces. These include improving the performance of public expenditures in important areas such as local government, education, health and social policy. The authors of this study have worked independently and the opinions expressed are therefore their own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the board of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

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Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from north-eastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations.

For over two years, he covered House standing committees as well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.