

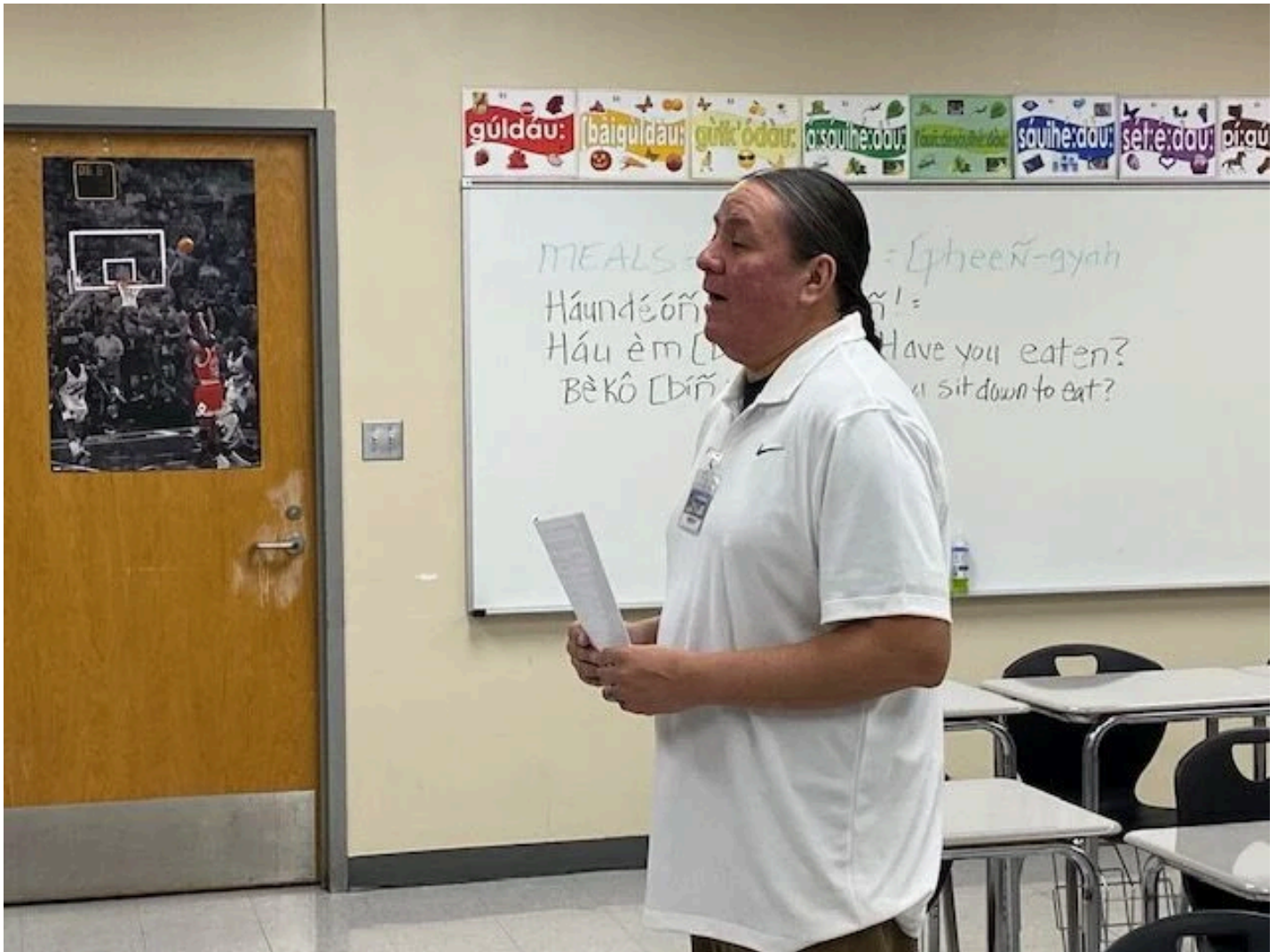
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SPOTLIGHT

Kiowa language teacher reflects on career, culture

By Kristin Ripley kristin.ripley@swoknews.com

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Carlo Chalepah teaches his 10:30 a.m. Kiowa Language class daily drills at the Life Ready Center.

By Kristin Ripley/staff

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As the Kiowa Language teacher for the Life Ready Center, Carlo Chalepah is first and foremost a family man.

“I love being anywhere around my family,” Chalepah said.

A native of Carnegie, Chalepah went to school at Carnegie High, but ended up graduating from Riverside Indian School. In his downtime, he likes to read and watch college basketball games.

His relationship with his family, including his parents and grandparents, has been impactful throughout his life.

“We have a tradition on my maternal side where the oldest grandson lives with our grandparents,” Chalepah said. “Not all Kiowas do that, but that’s something that my grandpa’s family practiced and traditionally kept on. I’m not the oldest grandson, but I was selected and was raised by them even though I had mom and dad.”

Keeping the Kiowa heritage and culture alive starts at home.

“It starts with a daily lifestyle,” Chalepah said. “The time we wake up to the time we go to bed. There’s outlets and resources educationally through our Kiowa language program that has good resources, but also in our culture and tradition that being raised in our Kiowa history has been passed down over the course of time. Preserving that and teaching that to our younger children as they grow up, that’s a really critical area for Kiowa. To understand who we are is through our tradition.”

Chalepah started out as a basketball coach at MacArthur High School before coming to the LRC.

“I had come in contact with (Raylisha York-Stanley) about the possibility of Kiowa language being taught to the school district,” Chalepah said. “I was interested. I stopped by her office one day and we had visited and discussed the dynamics for it to come to Lawton Public Schools. Whenever it was official that they were going to have the Kiowa class, that’s when I sought this position and landed this job.”

So far, he enjoys it.

“Every day just has its moments of challenges, but it don’t last that long,” Chalepah said. “It’s awesome, it’s very unique. It’s a really great work environment and great support system throughout the whole LPS district.”

His favorite part?

“The highlight is that my students come in to the classroom and, regardless of the subject or lesson that’s being taught, they’re hungry to learn more about the Kiowa language and it’s history,” Chalepah said. “Every day is a highlight. Every day is something new. That’s really incredible to see how my students are engaged.”

With the new course, there is still an ever-growing need to keep the Kiowa heritage, culture and language alive.

“It’s critical,” Chalepah said. “My grandparents had spoke fluent Kiowa and now some Kiowas don’t understand the language. It also reflects the attention of how important is it for the individual to preserve it as themselves. The progression of LPS having the attention to install not only the Comanche language but the Kiowa language and seeing the support of LPS in all areas, we’re getting all three high school students from each district to come here and learn Kiowa.”

Kristin Ripley

Reporter
