

Alumni - Mike & Tirza Shaffer

Mike & Tirza Shaffer are both Grant Union alumni. Mike was born and raised in Grant County. As the son of Bill and Gaylene Shaffer, Mike credits his maternal grandparents, Reuben and Doris Weickum, with bringing the family to John Day since his grandfather was a logger. His parents met at Grant Union and settled in the area, later welcoming Mike to the family. Mike attended Kiddie Kastle, Humbolt Elementary School, Blue Mountain Junior High School, and Grant Union High School, graduating in 1998. He played basketball throughout high school, and his favorite teachers were Mr. Kimball (Physics), Mr. Thunell (Weights/PE), and Mr. Mathews (CAD, Mechanical Drawing).

Tirza, daughter of Bob and Kay CowanThompson, moved to John Day at four years old, after her father accepted a job at Chester's Thriftway. She also attended Humbolt Elementary School, Blue Mountain Junior High School, and Grant Union High School, graduating in 1999. She was involved with student leadership and cheerleading. Her favorite teacher was Mr. Jones.

Although Mike and Tirza were only a year apart in high school, they credit Chester's with the location where they met and got to know each other better. Mike was working for Chester's as a "box kid," boxing groceries and stocking shelves. Tirza worked at True Value Hardware and was employed by Reser's to stock their products at Chester's weekly.

They dated through Mike's senior year and Tirza's junior year. They have many memories from high school, but their favorite was the Homecoming bonfire and Spirit Stick. "Homecoming was the best!" Tirza said, "We would do skits, and everything was a competition. The competition for the Spirit Stick was fierce!" Mike added, "And the skits were hilarious!" He also pointed out that when the girls played powder puff football, the boys would dress up as cheerleaders to cheer them on.

Mike enlisted in the Navy after graduation, and left for basic training in August. He returned home for a brief visit in April, just in time to escort Tirza to her senior prom. She graduated in June 1999, and the couple was married in September. Tirza joined him on base in Jacksonville, Florida, where he was designated as an airman and working his way up through the ranks. For a short time, he was assigned to selling snacks at the ARO, or Auxiliary Resale Outlet, a small convenience store or snack shack on base. She laughed that she used to tease him about being the hot dog man and sing a childhood song about hot dogs. "Every recruit gets assigned to wax floors, paint walls, and clean bathrooms," Mike said, "You knew you made it when you were assigned to the ARO!"

Throughout his naval career, the couple spent time in Florida, Hawaii, Virginia, Washington, and California. "I was on every aircraft carrier that we had at one time or another," Mike said, "either training or deployed." During this time, they were blessed with two daughters, Alana and Kaila, and both Mike and Tirza completed college educations. Mike obtained a Bachelor's degree in Aviation Maintenance Management from Embry-Riddle, as well as a Master's in Business Administration from Columbia College of Missouri. Tirza completed her Bachelor's degree in Education at Chaminade University of Honolulu. Mike retired in 2019 after twenty-one years in the Navy, and the couple returned to Grant County. They are thankful to be back in Grant County and love being a part of the entire community!

