They’ve caught the spirit

Clark College cheerleader proves the power of infectious enthusiasm

By BOB ALBRECHT
Columbian staff writer

Rather than searching for a school that filled her needs, Madelyn Long stepped onto the campus at Clark College and filled one of its.

The 18-year-old Columbia River High graduate revived the college’s dormant cheerleading club, making the latest attempt to bring pompons and high kicks to the court.

Long is the team’s founder, captain and choreographer after a month-long search failed to draw any interest and funds.

Juggling the responsibilities of a full-time job and managing the cheerleading squad that has already dipped from 24 members to 11 hasn’t been easy, Long said.

“Some had never done cheerleading before and they came and tried it and it wasn’t for them,” Long said. “It’s been quite difficult.”

But, she said — illustrating some cheerleader spirit — it’s also been quite rewarding.

“It’s brought a lot of attention to our basketball team,” said Long, who added that the team has helped her stay sharp as she prepares a bid to join a university cheer team, possibly as early as next fall.

Dancers gathered when fans advertising the cheer team and its tryouts surfaced on campus, said 19-year-old Tara Wood.

“I was kind of a skeptic because I heard that Clark hasn’t had a cheer team in seven, 10 years,” said Wood, a high school cheerleader and member of the Vancouver Vipers semi-professional cheerleading squad. “Everyone’s thinking it’s a joke.”

Wood’s qualifications, however, disappeared when she met Long.

“I love her,” Wood said. “She’s had the brunt of criticism and gone before the board and got it approved and all that. I really appreciate it. We all really appreciate her.”

Denise Huston, Clark College’s interim athletic director, said Long’s initiative is a boon for the athletic department.

He said it’s difficult to create the kind of excitement promised at University of Oregon and Oregon State University athletic events in the small community.

“Here, now we have to have something special that will interest our students to come to athletic events,” Huston said. “It’s a matter of getting as many different ways as we can to attract our students to come to athletic events.”

Huston said for a long time he’s known Long’s father, David Long, a mint on the sidelines of the Columbia River boys basketball team.

“I know her father and if she’s as good at cheerleading as her dad is as a coach, we’re going to have a pretty good squad,” Huston said.

Only a few games into the cheer club’s revival, Long is already searching for ways to ensure it remains even after she’s gone. She recently tapped Wood as her successor.

Huston, though, is holding out hope she’ll remain on campus.

“I’m going to try to keep her from leaving,” he said.