

Oregon Dental Association head, OHSU dean visit Grand Ronde

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

The dean of Oregon Health & Science University's Dentistry School and the executive director of the Oregon Dental Association visited the Grand Ronde Tribe on Wednesday, June 7, starting their tour of the state's nine federally recognized Tribes to discuss improving access to high-quality dental health care in Oregon Indian Country.

Dr. Phillip Marucha, OHSU's Dental School dean, and Conor McNulty, Dental Association head, were accompanied by Tribal lobbyist Justin Martin and Dental Association lobbyist George Okulitch.

They met with Health Services Executive Director Kelly Rowe, Dental Director Eric Webster and Hygienist Sheila Blacketer to learn more about the dental care options provided by the Grand Ronde Tribe and to discuss legislation currently before the Oregon Legislature that could help lure dentists to rural Oregon locations.

"Good dental health is fundamental to the well-being of our communities, and we hope to work together with Grand Ronde leaders on policies and programs that improve oral health care in Indian Country," McNulty said. "We know that Oregon has a unique relationship with its federally recognized Tribes, and we would like to continue that tradition through solid communication, education and respect for Tribal sovereignty."

The Senate bill currently being



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

From left, Conor McNulty, executive director of the Oregon Dental Association, Dr. Phillip Marucha, Oregon Health & Science University's School of Dentistry dean, George Okulitch, Dental Association lobbyist, and Justin Martin, Tribal lobbyist, listen as Tribal Hygienist Shelia Blacketer talks about the Tribe's Dental Clinic programs during a meeting at the Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center on Wednesday, June 7.

considered in the Oregon Legislature would establish an Indian Health Scholarship Program for Tribal youth pursuing careers as dentists and committing to work at a Tribal service site after graduation from dental school. If adopted, the program would start in the 2018-19 academic year and would be limited to students attending Oregon Health & Science University.

Martin said that considering the current budgetary challenges in Salem, it might be best to get the program approved this session and then return for funding in the next legislative session.

"Getting that program up and running would be a wonderful bene-

fit to Indian Country," Martin said.

After being briefed about the effective Grand Ronde Tribal dental offerings from Webster and Blacketer, Marucha discussed the university's policy of requiring seniors to perform six weeks of community service.

"Since I have been at the school, we have made it a priority that students who are graduating should be a resource for the whole state," Marucha said. "Not just the I-5 corridor; that means the whole state. We are growing our community service programs. We started from some students doing some community service ... Last year, students did four to five

weeks of community service and this year the current seniors will do six weeks."

Marucha said the community service helps graduating seniors become more culturally competent to work in rural areas of Oregon.

"Nominally, we have enough dentists in Portland," Marucha said. "We need to make sure that we cover the other underserved areas of the state. ... It is a priority for us to get students culturally competent and also to live in those areas."

Marucha said OHSU has sites in Coos Bay and Chiloquin where students live and perform community service.

"What I am particularly excited about is working with the Tribes around the state to get more of our students out there to provide service and also getting more (students) to choose to work there," Marucha said.

Dental students performing community service are at a semi-autonomous level, Marucha said, so that they can perform restorations, root canals and regular examinations.

"It makes no sense for us to send a student out who cannot extend what you do," he said.

McNulty said the Oregon Dental Association is visiting Tribes to avoid problems that have occurred in other states when reaching out to Indian Country.

"Our leadership wants to be proactive, wants to reach out and learn more about each individual Tribe's needs," he said. ■

Pedal power

The Tribe's Social Services Department sponsored a Bike Rodeo at the Tribal gym on Saturday, June 10. Natural Resources Department employees Kelly Dirksen and Zack Haas worked in the gym foyer, examining bicycles, diagnosing problems and attempting to make repairs. Inside the gym, Social Services employees and volunteers handed out Ride Safe packets and staffed Helmet Decorating and Helmet Sizing stations. Outside, Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department Chief Jake McKnight, Lt. Tim Hernandez and Officer Tyler Brown escorted young bike riders through an obstacle course that included a make-believe railroad crossing while Evidence Clerk Egypt Leno kept a log of participants. McKnight ensured that the bicyclists stopped, looked both ways and then proceeded. At the end of the two-hour Bike Rodeo, Social Services raffled off six bicycles that were won by Markuss Lewis, Desirae Hernandez, Angel Patterson, Benjamin Powley Jr., Tashina Bluehorse and Elvin Butler Sr. ■

Devon Wright, 9, examines the numerous stickers available to youths at the Helmet Decorating Station at the Social Services' Bike Rodeo.



Six-year-old Khloei Shelton listens to instructions from Grand Ronde Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight as she rode through the obstacle course set up outside the Tribal gym during the Social Services' Bike Rodeo held on Saturday, June 10.



Portland Office Tribal Services Representative Lisa Archuleta helps fit a helmet on 7-year-old Toby Garcia of Salem during the Bike Rodeo held inside the Tribal gym on Saturday, June 10. Tribal employees Darla Patterson and Kim Contreras also helped at the Helmet Fitting Station during the two-hour event. Garcia was in Grand Ronde visiting his grandfather, who took him to the rodeo.

Photos by Dean Rhodes