

# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

## Siletz Tribe Welcomes New Year; Faces New Challenges

First of all, on behalf of the Siletz Tribal Council, I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year and hope you had a wonderful Christmas.

We bid farewell to 2003 and welcome the new year! Despite the costly war in Iraq in terms of money and lives, and despite the plight of Oregon's economy, 2003 generally was a very good year for the Siletz Tribe – a year of tribal accomplishments.

We now look to the year before us, confident that we'll continue to surmount whatever challenges come our way just as we did last year and our ancestors did before us.

Our tribal population has grown, just as our programs and economy continue to grow. We now have more than 4,000 members – 62 percent of whom live within the 11-county service area and 38 percent outside of it. The largest number, 870, live in Lincoln County, followed by Marion, Multnomah, and other counties.

Twenty years ago, as a result of termination that caused our people to disperse, only about 50 percent lived within the service area. The statistics show that our tribal members are moving closer to home where greater prospects exist for jobs and services.

I, as chairman, and the Tribal Council have been very sensitive to the fact that tribal members who live outside the tribe's 11-county service area, about 1,500, are not eligible for certain federal benefits. This is because the federal



Chairman Delores Pigsley

government, unfortunately, defines who is or isn't eligible for federal services.

The challenge for the Tribal Council has been to somehow fill this gap. We've moved in that direction by allocating a percentage of gaming revenues to meet the service needs of members who live outside the service area. We've determined that certain health and other benefits, including per capita payments, that are funded out of gaming revenues do not require members to live within the service area.

It's important to remember that although the federal government defines who is an Indian eligible for federal services, the federal government can't define who is a member of a tribe. Like all other recognized tribes, we exercise the sovereign right to define who is a member of our tribe in the same way the U.S. government defines who is eligible to be a citizen of this country.

Our governmental headquarters and tribal center will continue to be Siletz and Lincoln County. But my

vision as tribal chairman is of a tribe whose members are bound together socially, culturally, and as a tribe, regardless of where we live. My vision is of the 4,000+ members, even though spread over the 11-county service area and beyond, are bound together by our common heritage, proud of who we are, what we have achieved, and what we will achieve together as a tribe.

## Siletz Community Health Clinic Services

I'd like to address a health service issue that has come to my attention. It involves a few complaints that appointments were made and then cancelled by the health clinic. Unfortunately, these apparently have happened.

In 2003, the Siletz Community Health Clinic served more than 1,800 patients. Because CHS operated on limited health funds, a priority system had to be established to guide CHS in determining in what order patients should get services. Medical care must be provided to patients who need it most. Because of this year's funding, the clinic had to resort to Priority I funding, which is treatment for urgent and emergency cases.

As Judy Muschamp, health director of the clinic, points out in *Nesika Illahee*, we're funded annually to provide for these services but when extraordinary care is necessary as a result of accidents or other emergency medical needs (particularly when the member has no insurance), CHS funds are drained.

To take full advantage of available resources, the clinic screens patients who might be eligible for the Oregon Health Plan or other coverage and makes appropriate referrals. (It's important that we all keep any health coverage that's available. Currently, we pay Part B Medicare for 123 people who are over age 65 or disabled.)

As you know, medical costs have skyrocketed, a universal, national problem. Appropriations for health care have not kept up with inflation. The problems that the tribe faced during 2003 basically occurred because of the shortage of health care funds, skyrocketing medical costs, and catastrophic cases.

As Judy points out in her article, gaming revenues were used to supplement funds that the clinic identified

would be needed to get us through our budget crisis. The council also made \$200,000 available for certain medical services to members who live outside our service area (who are not eligible for Indian Health Service benefits).

According to Judy, every effort is made to notify patients well in advance if services must be deferred because he or she doesn't meet the required priority. There have been cases, however, where the tribal member had no phone or couldn't be reached for other reasons and word didn't get to him or her in time.

Judy regrets circumstances like these that cause inconvenience and other problems for our members. She welcomes complaints that should be brought directly to her if a patient doesn't get satisfaction from her staff. Only in this way, she says, can CHS live up to its mission of providing satisfactory answers and services to our members.

## Oregon Supreme Court Dismisses PACT Suit

Unfortunately, anti-Indian and anti-Indian gaming forces are alive and well not only elsewhere in the U.S., but also here in Oregon!

A group called People Against a Casino Town (PACT) brought suit in the Oregon Supreme Court seeking to stop the Coos Tribe from establishing a casino in Florence, contending that the state legislature and not the governor has the right to negotiate gaming compacts.

The suit, if upheld, would have invalidated all gaming compacts in Oregon. All eight gaming tribes, including Siletz, have compacts negotiated and executed by the governor.

PACT tried to bypass the usual legal process by going straight to the state Supreme Court. Although the court dismissed the suit, PACT seems determined to pursue its case by filing its suit in Circuit Court.

This isn't simply an issue of whether the governor or the state legislature has the right to negotiate gaming compacts. A number of complex legal ramifications can come out of this that can spell trouble for tribal gaming in Oregon.

Oregon tribes are very aware of what is happening and through the Gaming Alliance, are prepared to deal with this problem.

## General Council Meeting

Feb. 7, 2004 – 1 p.m.  
Siletz Tribal Community Center  
Siletz, Oregon  
Agenda

Call to Order  
Invocation  
Roll Call  
Approval of Agenda  
Approval of Minutes  
Committee Reports from Council

Tribal Member Concerns  
Chairman's Report  
Announcements  
Adjournment  
Elections