

The Six County Service Saga: the challenge of meeting members' needs

By Oscar Johnson

The Six County Service Area, certain Oregon counties that some of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's member services and programs are restricted to, has been a topic of contention for many tribal members — especially those not lucky enough to reside in the area.

Since Spirit Mountain Casino opened in 1995, the Grand Ronde Tribe has seen health and social services for all members, regardless of what county they live in, mushroom from nearly zero to more than 66 percent — showing that the Tribe is striving towards its strategic plan to ensure "a fair distribution of resources among tribal members in different situations and locations."

Yet recent community meetings held outside Grand Ronde show many agree with Portland area member, Jon George, who says those outside the area sometimes feel, "like they're being penalized for where they live. It's sad to see that a tribal member would be denied services."

Tribal officials, however, stress that it takes time to make changes and say member awareness of changes that have already taken place is also needed.

They note that historically, member services were restricted to the Six County Service Area because it was mandated by the 1983 Grand Ronde Reservation Act, the law which restored the Tribe to its federally recognized status.

The Act states that, "in the case of federal services available to members of federally recognized Indian tribes residing on or near a reservation, members of the Tribe residing in the following counties of the state of Oregon shall be deemed to be residing on or near a reservation." The act goes on to list Washington, Marion, Yamhill, Polk, Tillamook and Multnomah counties.

"Any funds that come from federal programs like the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) or IHS (Indian Health Services), explains the Tribe's Executive Assistant, Chris Leno, "is mandated to stay within the six counties."

But some members are still denied tribal services and question why county restrictions still apply now that the Tribe no longer has to rely on federal dollars for the bulk of its program funding.

Currently, services such as child care, Elder services, mental health, employment and emergency home repair programs are entirely funded by tribal revenues but are still restricted to certain counties.

Most programs that are restricted to specific counties are confined to the Six County Service Area, but a few are extended to cover eight or ten county areas.

"I don't really understand stuff like that," says 62-year-old Robert Rife,

a Prineville member recently turned down for an Emergency Housing Repair assistance because he lives outside the program's 10 county service area. "All I know is I can't get anything."

Despite the shortcomings of restricting the Emergency Housing Repair program to 10 counties, the Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority (GRTHA) has actually managed to expand the program's original service area, says GRTHA Director, Linda Layden.

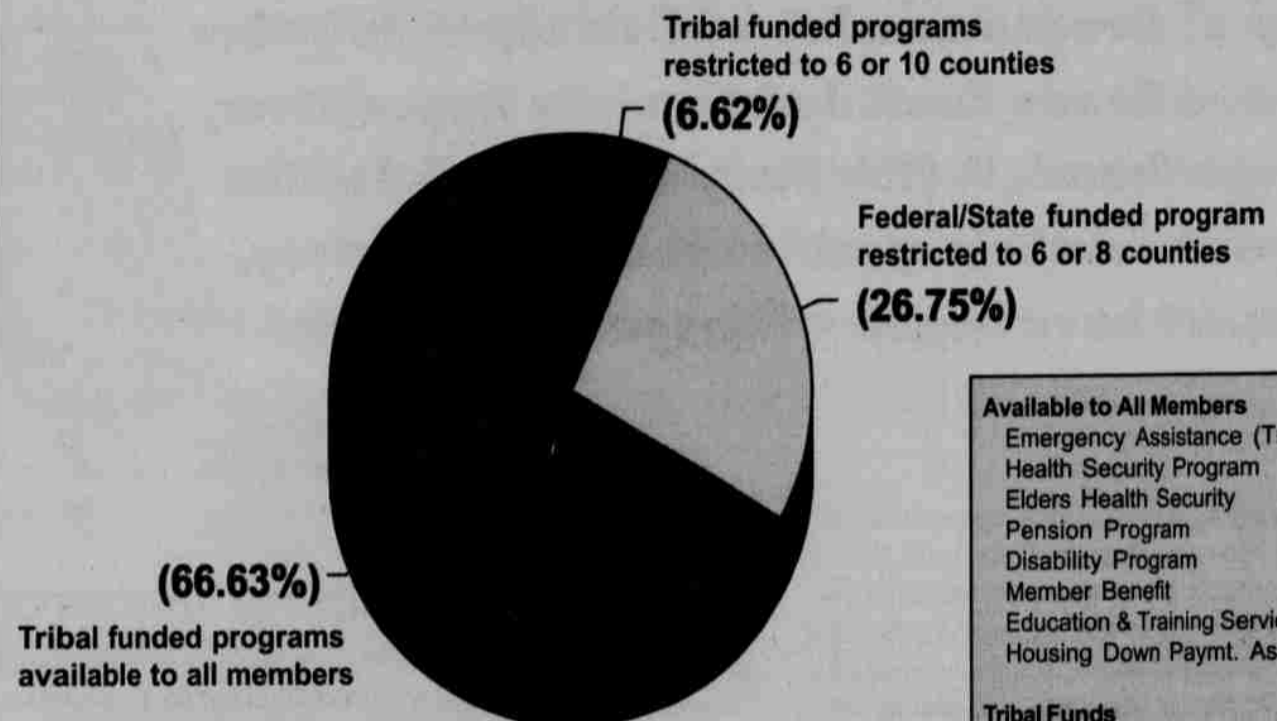
"We feel we made a step by adding four counties (Benton, Clackamas, Lincoln and Linn)," says Layden who explained that since GRTHA must inspect the homes to be repaired, produce cost estimates, work contracts and monitor repairs it is not feasible to take on projects in far away locales.

Similarly, Acting Executive Officer, Greg Archuleta, says the Tribe has also managed to extend the Housing Down Payment Assistance program beyond the Six County Service Area but adds that many services such as the Tribal Before and After School Child Care and the Elder Outreach programs are community-based programs.

The facilities, personnel and resources needed to run these programs in far away counties are beyond the Tribe's current capacity and many programs also include tribal dollars because the federal funds are inadequate.

Instead of simply extending existing services to other areas, he says tribal officials have used an "incremental approach" whereby member input has led to implementing new programs that are available to all members such as members' benefits, scholarships, health security and pension.

1998 Direct Service Budget Funds



Available to All Members
Emergency Assistance (Tribal)
Health Security Program
Elders Health Security
Pension Program
Disability Program
Member Benefit
Education & Training Services (Tribal)
Housing Down Paymt. Assistance
Tribal Funds
Restricted to six county area
Health Deferred Services
Elder Outreach
Mental Health
Employment Services
Senior Services
Tribal Before/After School Care
Education Youth Services
Restricted to ten county area
Housing Emergency Assistance
Major Rehabilitation
Deferred Loans
Federal/State Funds
Restricted to six county area
Contract Health Care
Dental
Pharmacy
Medical Services
Radiology/Lab
Mental Health (IHS)
Community Health Care
General Assistance
Social Services Block Grant
Vocational Rehabilitation
Senior Services
Community Services Block Grant
Alcohol & Drug Prevention (State)
Social Services (BIA)
Domestic Violence
Family Services Block Grant
Education & Training Services (BIA)
Johnson O'Malley
Childcare Development
Childcare Grant
IHS Sanitation Improvements
Restricted to eight county area
Alcohol & Drug Outpatient

The majority of the Tribe's member services are available to all members, according to budget figures given by Archuleta. He says even tribal monies preserved in trust funds are set aside so accrued interests will fund programs that benefit all members.

Currently, 24 percent of the Tribe's revenue comes from the federal government for programs such as clinical and medical services, drug and alcohol treatment and pharmacy services which are restricted to certain counties.

About 51 percent of 1998 tribal expenditures will go directly to member services such as health, education, housing and pensions which are available to all members regardless of where they live. Of this amount, 15 percent is restricted by county and 36 percent goes to services for all members.

The remaining 49 percent is combined with federal funds to cover non-direct costs such as tribal government, natural resource management and community development, Archuleta says.

"As we do look at expanding programs and services, the Tribal Council will look at making those services available to all members — wherever they live," Archuleta says. "I think at the Community Meetings it was expressed how grateful people were for how we were able to make services available to everyone."

He also notes that tribal policy makers have to balance members' suggestions for expanded services with suggestions for building infrastructure in Grand Ronde.

According to voting results taking from recent community meetings held in Portland, Salem, Eugene, Bend and Grand Ronde, the 100 or so members who voted chose building infrastructure in Grand Ronde as

the seventh important priority. While the Six County Service Area was a popular topic for discussion at most meetings, when the votes were tallied it ranked only as the No. 12 priority.

Voting seemed to depend on where members lived with Bend members casting all of the 12 votes against the Six County Service Area restrictions and — along with Portland members — casting no votes for Grand Ronde infrastructure.

But it is hard for Rife to reconcile the complex issues tribal officials have to juggle in order to comply with voter's needs and his own need to fix a leaking roof before the fall rains set in.

"I don't know what to say," shrugged the Elder. "I just need help."