

Members invited to vote on paper's name change

By Tracy Dugan, Editor

In the letters and phone calls I received about the paper's name change, I have found a pattern developing about why some people are upset. It seems to fall into two general categories:

1. The name *Grand Ronde Review* sounds too non-Indian or mainstream. It doesn't identify to others who we are.

2. The membership should have been consulted before a decision of this nature was made.

The idea to change the name of *Smoke Signals* wasn't arbitrary or unilateral. Yes, it was my idea. But I took it to Tribal Council, talked with them about it, and we all decided to give it a try. It didn't occur to me to ask for a vote from the membership because the membership elects Tribal Council to make decisions on their behalf.

I am no stranger to criticism. The newspaper is published two times per month, and rarely does a week go by when at least one person doesn't call me to make a suggestion or let me know that such and such a story should be written on such and such a topic. This paper is mailed to almost every tribal household. It's impossible to please every single reader. But what tribal members have always told me over and over is this: *The paper is too much of a newsletter. It doesn't have any real information. It only tells one side of the story. We want a newspaper.* Four years ago, many members were incensed that *Smoke Signals* didn't have a Letters To The Editor page like most other tribal papers do. Many members asked for this in the *Smoke Signals*. I thought it was a great idea, and I went to Tribal Council and asked to try it out. Now, four years later, it's the most popular page in the paper. I was responding to what I thought the members wanted. What I kept hearing time and again was that the membership wanted a real newspaper.

But here's the thing: *Smoke Signals* is the name of a newsletter. It was a great and wonderful name when the Tribe was small and only a few people outside of the general membership ever saw it or cared to read it. But things have changed now. The fact is, everyone wants to know who we are and what we are all about.

In the six years I have been here, the circulation of the paper has quadrupled. It is circulated all over the state of Oregon. It is mailed to every state in the Union and Canada.

It is the first thing people see or read about the Grand Ronde Tribe. Other than the Casino and its advertising, the paper is the first impression people get about us. What kind of an impression do we want to make? I have posed this question to many

members who have called me, angry about the name change. They reply, "Who cares what others think? It only matters what tribal members think."

It matters.

The term "Smoke Signals" conjures up stereotypical images of who Indian people are. I am old enough to remember how they got started in my own mind. Cartoons and old westerns that depicted a Native person sitting on a hill, waving a blanket over a burning fire, and he didn't even know how to talk. He only grunted. Yes, Indian people years and years ago did use smoke signals to communicate with each other. But that wasn't our only method of expression. That fact has been distorted by non-Indian society to create a gross caricature of who Indian people are. It perpetuates a myth, a false image of our culture. That myth is this: Indians don't know how to communicate. They have no language of their own. They walk around making grunting noises like "ugh, ugh." They are savages.

We all know the truth. We are a very sophisticated people with our own language, our own culture, and our own way of life.

Don't we have an obligation to help eradicate these myths among non-Indian populations?

There is still a lot of ignorance in society about Indian people. When the newspaper is the very first thing others see about us, I want us to be taken seriously. I want someone to pick up the paper and say "Now here is a tribe that is serious about who they are. Serious about their culture. They are working for the future, providing opportunities for their members."

"Smoke Signals" brings on such stereotypical images, it's hard for others to respect us in that way when it's the first thing they see.

We can say to ourselves, "That's their ignorance. That's their racism."

I would rather do what I can to educate people.

It is a difficult thing to fathom, considering how we are supposed to be living in a progressive age and all. But believe it or not, there are still people in this country who operate under the stereotypes that I mentioned. People who would rather not have anything to do with Indians. Who would rather not have Indian people as patrons in their establishments. And, there are people in government who want to take away everything we have. My point is this: Non-Indian perception of who we are matters. When people have an accurate understanding of Native American culture and tradition, they will have a new vision of tribes, and that cartoonish image of Indians as savages will no longer exist in their

minds. We will have the respect that we deserve and the respect that we have earned. When we have respect, we have power. And when we have power, we can make sure that what happened to the Tribe in the past never happens again.

The other point I want to make is that in a very short time, the Tribe has become so successful, that everyone is watching us. Not only in the Northwest, but all over the country. People want to know the secret of our success and how we operate. We are a tribe, it's true. But we are also an organization. I sat in a General Council meeting one Sunday afternoon more than four years ago, where Chairman Mark Mercier posed the question to the people, "Would you be in favor of the Tribe building a casino on tribal land?" Every hand in the room shot up.

I sat in the General meeting only one month ago and listened to Bob Watson tell us that the Tribal Housing Authority was going to take part in a pilot housing project that would be used as a model for other tribes to follow. We are an organization. We are leaders in Indian Country, helping pave the way for future growth and success. That's what we all wanted. And every organization in mainstream society will tell you that what others think of you, that very first impression...it matters. I know

that many members have a sentimental attachment to the name "Smoke Signals." I can understand that and appreciate it. The name has been around for a long time. I would ask that all members who dislike the new name of the tribal newspaper think about what is best for the Tribe as a whole, rather than focusing on how it makes you feel personally.

"Smoke Signals" fosters a false stereotype that we as Indian people have a responsibility not to promote.

It matters. Changing the name of the newspaper may be a small step in changing how we are perceived, but it matters.

Some members have said to me that although they don't mind the idea of changing the name of the paper, they don't particularly care for the name *Grand Ronde Review*. I am suggesting that interested members complete the form below and mail it back. We will seriously consider the tribal membership input on this matter. I think this is fair, and it really gives the members a voice in the decision.

Simply choose one of the names listed, or write in your own newspaper name. All I ask is that you think about the points I have raised in this article before making your decision. This coupon will run for the next month, so everyone who wants to vote will have the chance.

NAME CHANGE SURVEY

TRIBAL MEMBERS ONLY: please take time to read the above article and cast your vote.

One vote per tribal member over 18 years of age.

- ☐ Grand Ronde Review
- ☐ Grand Ronde Tribal Review
- ☐ Grand Ronde Native Review
- ☐ Five Feathers News
- ☐ Grand Ronde Tribal News
- ☐ Smoke Signals
- ☐ I have no preference
- ☐ Other _____

Please include your Roll Number: _____

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Grand Ronde, OR 97347

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