

COURT KIDS

■ An innovative program holds youths to a higher standard by getting them to own up to their actions and make amends in a Grand Ronde-based community court.

By Oscar Johnson

Every other month four to six Polk County youths who have broken the law find themselves in Grand Ronde Council Chambers explaining their actions to a Sanction Court.

The offenders, who have been as young as seven-years-old, are not answering solely to the Tribe for their actions but to a diverse panel of fellow community members.

The ambience of Council Chambers, says Rhonda Holder, Polk County juvenile probation officer, simply helps make youths' experience "a very imposing situation."

Sanction Court is a way to deter mostly first-time low-level offenders from an adolescence, and perhaps a lifetime, of crime. In addition to giving the youths a second chance to avoid the juvenile criminal justice system, the program aims to foster community involvement.

The state and county sanctioned program allows youths under 18 to come clean before a court panel comprised of local law enforcement, school, mental health, tribal, community and county juvenile justice representatives.

"Kids tell the panel what they did; why they did it; and how they can better handle the situation in the future," says Officer Eric Shepard of Polk County Sheriff's Grand Ronde substation. "And we don't take 'I don't know' for an answer."

Imposed sanctions for the alleged

offenses range from community service and touring a correctional facility to writing an essay or a letter of apology.

The youths have 60 days to comply with the sanctions and report back to the court on their own volition.

If they do not, Shepard says they are usually given one more chance to make amends with additional sanctions and another 60 days.

If they still fail to comply with sanctions their case is handed over to the Polk County Juvenile Department to be handled by a juvenile probation officer.

"The main goal of the whole thing is to weed out the juveniles that don't belong in the system," says Shepard. "(Grand Ronde Tribal) Council has been really helpful in letting us use Council Chambers for our court room. It has a real impact in terms of making it look real official."

The program started last year following the success of a similar pilot project in Monmouth and Independence, says Holder.

Now communities in Grand Ronde, Willamina and Sheridan have juvenile sanction courts. Youths are referred to the program by local law enforcement.

"We decided to try it in Grand Ronde," says Holder who also adds that a "lion's share" of west Polk county juvenile offenses such as cur-



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few violations, truancy or runaways, take place in Grand Ronde.

About 30 youths have been to Sanction Court in the last year and only six became repeat offenders, according to Holder and Shepard.

Holder, who has been working in juvenile justice in Texas and Oregon for 18 years, says Sanction Court meets several needs that were not being covered by the standard juvenile system.

"We would have youths that were not being held accountable at the beginning of their (alleged criminal) activity which would give them permission to do it again or at an adult level," explains Holder. "A lot of these kids would only get a parental sanction letter asking parents to sanction them and sometimes that is not enough."

In addition to holding youths accountable for their actions, Sanction Court can also help bring other factors to light that contribute to juvenile delinquency.

Shepard says the court's stern questioning of defendants revealed that two of the six youths who reappeared before the court had "deeper issues at work" that were not entirely in their control.

This is an important benefit to the program, according to Holder.

"We can sanction them to get evaluated and treated for drug and alcohol, mental health or one on one

counseling," says Holder. Without Sanction Court, she says, "those youths that have the need for these other services would still have the need" after going through the regular system.

Forty-six youths were referred to the county's juvenile department in the last five months. Although county juvenile crime statistics were not available before going to press, officials are confident Sanction Court works because they see few repeat offenders.

Holder says now that the program has been successful in Independence and Monmouth where it began and "Grand Ronde has proved we can do it in a rural area," she hopes to soon see sanction courts in Dallas and West Salem.

"I feel it works really well out there," she says of Grand Ronde from her Dallas office. "A lot of parents that have been very supportive about keeping their kids accountable. Hopefully I won't see the kids later on in my case load."

Learn more about Sanction Court:

- Rhonda Holder
Polk County Juvenile Dept.
(503) 623-2349, ext. 322
- Grand Ronde Substation
879-2420 or 879-2419

CULTURAL HERITAGE & HISTORY WORKSHOP

Governance Building Classroom • Grand Ronde

Friday, July 16 • 9 A.M. to 4 P.M.

This workshop is FREE to all tribal members and seating is limited.
To register contact: June Olson at 879-2249 or 1-800-422-0232 ext. 2249.

Sponsored by the Cultural Resources Program.

- 9 - 9:15 A.M. ----- Invocation & Welcome
(Marilee Norwest-Davis, Elder/Iroquois descendant)
- 9:15 - 9:30 A.M. ----- Chinook Celebration Song (Tribal Before & After School Children)
- 9:30 - 9:45 A.M. ----- Welcome (Kathryn Harrison, Tribal Council Chair)
- 9:45 - 10:00 A.M. ----- Introduction
(June Olson, Cultural Resource Manager/Iroquois descendant)
- 10 - 10:15 A.M. ----- Break
- 10:15 - Noon ----- Iroquois Ancestors: Grand Ronde Descendants
(Bruce Watson, Researcher/Historian from Canada)
- Noon - 1 P.M. ----- Flint Knapping Demonstration (Scott Byram, Archaeologist)
Traditional Carving Demonstration (Bill Child, Native Artist)
- 1 - 2 P.M. ----- Grand Ronde Treaties & The Chiefs Who Signed Them (June Olson)
- 2 - 2:15 P.M. ----- Break
- 2:15 - 3:15 P.M. ----- Chinook Jargon: More Than a Trade Language
(Tony Johnson, Language Specialist/Kathlamet descendant)
- 3:15 - 4 P.M. ----- Reclaiming Our Past: Repatriation Under the Native American Graves Protection Act (Lindy Trolan, Cultural Resource Anthropologist)



Ending the year with a celebration

Grand Ronde Elementary School kids held a pow-wow on June 4 in the school gym. There was drumming and dancing, and tribal students wore their regalia for Grand Entry. Indian tacos were served for lunch. Pictured from left: Halona Butler, Grand Ronde Miss Tiny Tot; Leland "Brother" Butler; and Joey Holmes. Photo by Oscar Johnson.