

Tribal Council, staff reach out to membership

Continued from front page

"The Tribe is aware that there are more community development needs and desires," said Mercier. "Part of these meetings and part of talking with our membership is trying to get information to help our Tribal Council begin to prioritize some of these projects that everybody would like to see done."

"We realize that Tribal Council and the tribal staff have worked very hard to accommodate these community development needs," said Mercier of the projects that have already been completed and the projects that could be completed in the future. "Everyday we are continually challenged by trying to find a place to put something or someone. These projects are the desire of our membership and of our Council — your requests do not fall on deaf ears, but they do have to be worked into a plan that is realistic."

Mercier explained that many of the projects planned for the future have individual issues that need to be addressed before work can begin. Some of these issues, he said, are trying to put land into trust with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, contending with wetlands and rare plants when wanting to build, dealing with utility requirements and even overlapping jurisdictional issues keep the Tribe busy and at the forefront of community and political negotiations.

Mercier said he wanted to hear from tribal members about what kind of development they would like to see in the future. He said tribal member input would be critical in deciding which projects will go forward and which projects will get put on the back burner.

Tribal Council members think the community meetings are one of the most important things they do each year.

"I think it is very important to get out there and meet with our tribal members," said Tribal Council Vice-Chair Ed Larsen. "It gives them more of a personal touch to what we are doing here at the Tribe and it makes them feel more like a part of it. Community meetings are more one-on-one and I like that."

Larsen said the meetings help Council understand the needs of the membership.

"We find out what we can do to help them more," said Larsen. "We want to look at ways to help our people outside of Grand Ronde as well, so we continually look at ways to do that. Most people understand that this (the Grand Ronde community) is the core area and this is where things started."

Larsen said one of the best things to come out of the community meetings is new ideas.



Tribal Council members Butch LaBonte (left) and Val Grout (right) informed tribal families at the community meeting in Tualatin about how educational endowments and health benefits can make their lives better.

Photos by Brent Merrill

"It is very important to have these meetings because sometimes members bring to the table ideas we haven't thought of here at home," said Larsen. "I hope someday we can get a satellite office in some of these towns. We have a lot of members in Portland; maybe we could start up there and see how it works. We listen and we take it serious what they say and we take it back home and talk it over in our subcommittee meetings. I've enjoyed them ever since they started. There are a lot of positives that come out of these meetings."

Tribal Council member Val Grout said she likes the personal touch the community meetings provide.

"It gives you a face to face with the tribal members that don't live here in the community," said Grout. "We get to hear their concerns. I enjoy it."

Grout said she agrees with Larsen on the importance of being in touch with the tribal membership outside of Grand Ronde.

"I think it is so important. When all the meetings are over, and all the information is gathered and brought to Council, then we can see what the needs of the people are and what we can do to address those needs," said Grout.

She also said the meetings are an opportunity

for Council to work as a team and really listen to members' concerns. She said it is an opportunity for Council to network with individual members and not let their concerns fall through the cracks.

Grout said because the Tribe is a family organization, the community meetings are a way to extend that family beyond the center of tribal activity in Grand Ronde.

"I really enjoy meeting new tribal members and I get kind of excited to find out which family they are from," said Grout.

After the large group discussion, members present broke down into smaller groups facilitated by staff and Council members. The smaller groups discussed issues and concerns in more detail.

■ Tribal members at Tualatin's meeting wanted to know about how to gain better access to tribal programs. Members living outside the Tribe's Six County Service Area shared their frustration with accessing program services they say they need.

One tribal member in attendance wanted the issue of transportation for members outside the service area examined.

One member asked about youth counseling services and urged Tribal Council to continue funding youth related programs, education scholarships and college opportunities.

Members expressed a desire to see the Tribe's Elder pension plan continued and money set aside to ensure the pension is perpetual. Members said they want Tribal Council to consider increasing the fund intermittently to keep up with inflation and the rising costs of living.

■ Tribal members in Eugene want Council to look at also providing insurance for non-tribal member spouses under the age of 55. One member asked Council to look at the development of an assisted living program for tribal Elders.

Members in Eugene wanted to know if the water situation in Grand Ronde will keep the Tribe from further expansion and development and they wanted to know if the Tribe is considering the purchase of more timberland.

■ In Grand Ronde, tribal members said they would like to see the education and housing programs expanded to include as many services to tribal members as possible. One tribal Elder said he would like to see the Health Trust Fund continue and even increased if possible. Members also expressed a desire to see the Tribe increase the Elder's pension fund and continue to place priority emphasis on education and the establishment of satellite offices in outlying areas.

■ In Bend, only one tribal member and her husband showed up for the meeting.



Business Development Specialist Perri McDaniel facilitates a group discussion at the Tualatin community meeting on Monday, March 20. The future of the Tribe's endowment funding was the subject of many of the small group discussions.