

Popular "Passages of the Deep" will get additional fish, sharks for their new exhibit

■ Grant from Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde will help stock the Oregon Coast Aquarium.

By Chris Mercier

From the icy reaches of the Bering, to the milder climates of Puget Sound and Coos Bay, one force has maintained a peculiar consistency in the lives of the region's Natives for centuries — the ocean. Whether as a reliable source of food, or transportation, or destruction, or religious inspiration, indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest to this day still regard the big blue with uncanny respect.

Some things never change.

The Oregon Coast Aquarium's new *Passages of the Deep* exhibit will get a healthy boost thanks to a recent grant from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and their Spirit Mountain Community Fund.

A \$48,250 grant will be used to acquire additional specimens for the aquarium's new exhibit, which features a 200-foot long acrylic tube suspended in the middle of a 1.3 million-gallon tank. The tube allows visitors a 360-degree view of the ocean environment.

"Exhibits like *Passages of the Deep* help us better understand the rich environment that exists under the ocean's surface," said Ed Pearsall, Tribal Council member and a Spirit Mountain Community Fund trustee. "Through educational exhibits like this one we create more knowledge and appreciation of the natural world that has sustained human life for thousands of years."

Many aquarium-goers will already be partially familiar with the exhibit — the tank is the same one that housed the unforgettable Keiko, the world famous killer whale who returned to Iceland in 1998. Since his departure in November of that year, work on the nearly \$7 million project began immediately, finishing earlier this year and opening May 27.

The exhibit is divided into three different habitats: the Orford Reef featuring sea life that would live on a rocky reef and kelp forest; Halibut Flats, featuring skates, flounders and

other fish that live on the sandy bottom; and Open Sea, featuring leopard sharks, seven-gill sharks, bat rays, and long-nosed sharks, among others.

Passages of the Deep boasts some rather exotic touches, among them a hefty fiberglass rendition of a sunken shipwreck. The aquarium also consulted divers to design the artificial rocks that adorn the Orford Reef, giving it a rustic, real appearance.

The success of the exhibit has been unprecedented. Since its opening Memorial Day weekend, the exhibit has drawn roughly 450,000 people, popularity enjoyed not even during the Keiko heydays.

"So far, we have had nothing but positive comments on the exhibit," said Phyllis Bell, President of the Oregon Coast Aquarium. "This may be the most successful exhibit we've ever had."

One recurring problem with Keiko, Bell said, was that his tank was a much bigger 2 million gallons, meaning less

visibility. Thus if Keiko was not in a particularly social mood, he would relax in some unseen portion of the tank, and on many occasions aquarium-goers could not see him at all. This inconsistency drew many complaints.

The set-up of *Passages of the Deep* affords viewers unhindered views of the tank, with hundreds of fish, sharks and rays to marvel at.

The Community Fund grant will allow aquarium staff to make more expeditions with local fishermen to gather Oregon coastal specimens. Some of the fish on the wanted list are more sharks and a few of the elusive sunfish.

The grant also will underwrite the cost of bringing the aquarium's school outreach program to Grand Ronde and Willamina elementary schools. Additionally, all students in the two schools will be able to visit the aquarium for a reduced \$1 per student admission fee in January and February.

About the Spirit Mountain Community Fund:

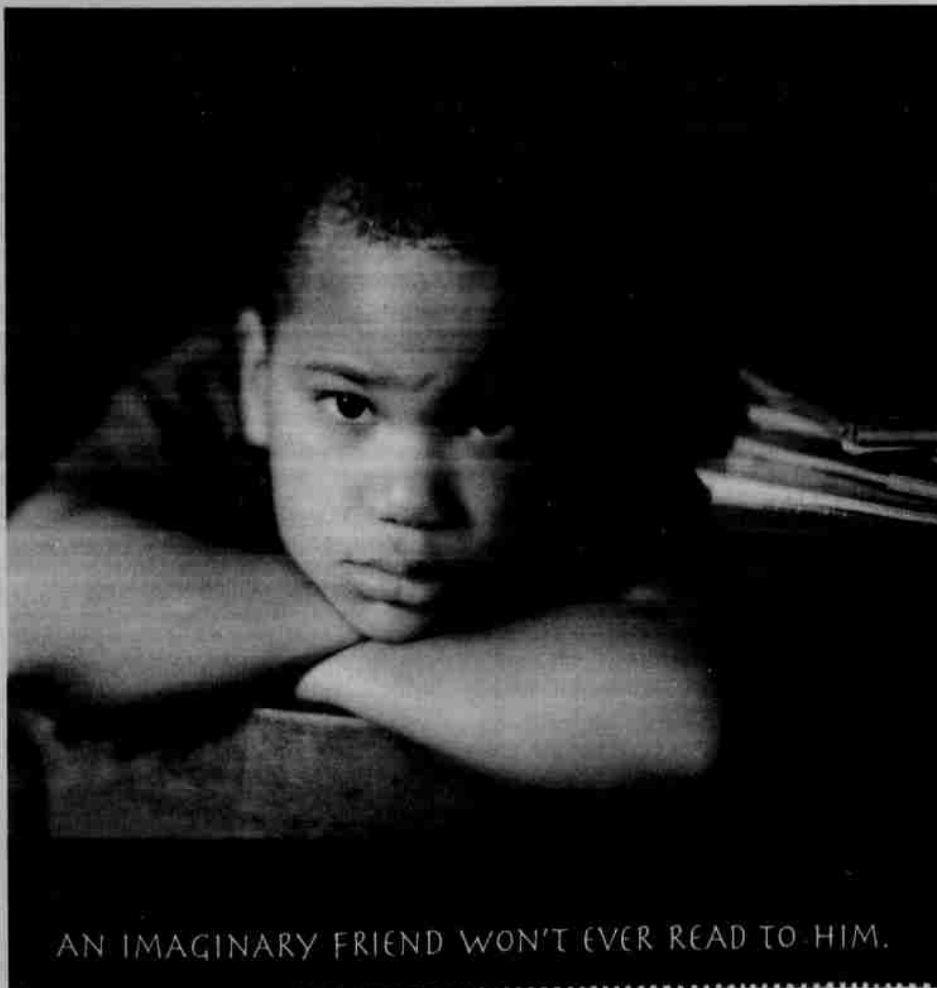
The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde created the Community Fund in 1997 as a way to practice the Tribal tradition of sharing in the community. Fund grants have helped thousands of schoolchildren in Yamhill County, and throughout Western Oregon, visit OMSI, the Oregon Zoo and the Oregon Coast Aquarium by subsidizing field trips. The Community Fund supported the aquarium's development of salmon, frog, and whale exhibits and has given money to the Oregon Coast Children's Theater.

A major grant allowed Life Flight emergency helicopters to purchase a navigation system and build weather stations in Lincoln City, Tillamook, and Grand Ronde so Life

Flight can operate in inclement weather.

The Community Fund also has funded domestic abuse prevention programs run by the Henderson House Family Crisis Center and transportation services for Yamhill County Veteran's Services. The Community Fund also has helped bring the SMART reading program to greater Portland-area schools.

Each year, the Community Fund distributes six percent of the profits from Spirit Mountain Casino to worthy non-profit organizations and projects in the 11 western counties that make up the Tribe's ancestral homelands.



The purchase of books and expansion of the SMART reading program in a partnership with the Blazers is just one example of how Oregon benefits from the Grand Ronde Tribes and Spirit Mountain Community Fund. The Community Fund gives 6% of profits from Spirit Mountain Casino to local schools, health care, environmental protection, and other worthy programs. Since its 1997 inception, thousands of Oregonians have shared in the benefits of the Community Fund, proving that the spirit of giving something back is alive and well at Spirit Mountain.



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