

Ground for Veterans' Memorial Dedicated in Veterans' Day Service

Crowd of over 100 people gather in Grand Ronde for groundbreaking ceremony.



Grand Ronde Tribal Elder and Veteran Marcellus Norwest led the Grand Ronde Color Guard during the opening of the memorial groundbreaking ceremony. Norwest is a tireless advocate for Veteran's rights and recognition. Here, above, Norwest reminds those in attendance of the importance of Veteran's Day and the ongoing commitment made by those who served their country.

Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal member Travis Benoist (below), from Eagle Butte, South Dakota, opened the groundbreaking ceremony by blessing the earth and the people. Benoist offered his blessing to the four directions in a traditional way.



Story and photos by Brent Merrill

The wait is over. The ground has been broken and the process of establishing a memorial to area Veterans, that has been at least ten years in the making, is finally officially underway.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Saturday, November 11 at the Tribal Governance Center before approximately 100 supporters on Veteran's Day.

The Tribe's Veterans' Color Guard led the ceremony following Travis Benoist's blessing of the ground. The Veteran's Memorial Ad Hoc Committee and the Tribal Council turned out to show their support for the event and for the memorial.

"There would be no freedom in America without Veterans," said Gene Hancock of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs and a volunteer consultant to the Tribe's Veterans' Memorial Committee. "These are exciting times for the Confederated Tribes because this memorial is moving from conceptual stage to reality."

The memorial will honor men and women Veterans from Grand Ronde, Willamina and Sheridan.

The memorial, which is being designed by Tribal member and Veteran Steve Bobb of Willamina, will feature a man and a woman prominently. The man and woman are wearing traditional clothing and reaching toward the sky. Four granite pillars are placed around the memorial featuring the names of Veterans who served in each of the four armed forces.

Even though the project is being spearheaded by the Tribe and so far, a majority of the money raised has come from the Tribe, the memorial will honor all Veterans and not just Tribal members.

"It has been ten years in the making," explained Hancock who has been involved with the committee for at least the last two years. "The Tribe, in the spirit of the occasion, is including all Veterans and not just Tribal member Veterans. They are honoring all who served. We think, at the ODVA (Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs), that that personifies the spirit of the Tribe and the tri-communities."

Hancock said he is also impressed by the Tribe's desire to honor women Veterans as well as the men.

"I do think that is incredible," said Hancock. "If you look at the history of memorials in this nation it is unique. Our benefits counselors have found through the years that often women who served don't consider themselves Veterans. That goes back to WWII. Some of that comes from the fact that they didn't serve in combat. Primarily that comes from the fact the nation didn't recognize them. It is only recently that women are being recognized and honored for the roles they played serving this nation as Veterans. The stories that you hear women tell are just incredible. They put it on the line just like the men."

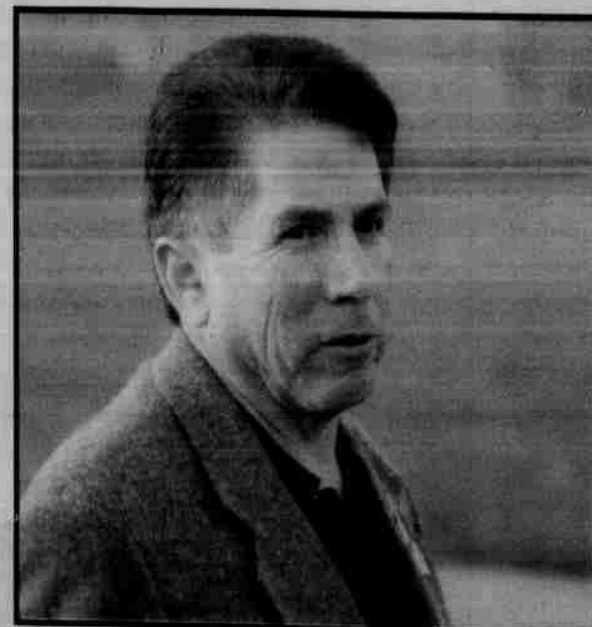
Hancock said it has been his experience that all Tribal cultures make a point of honoring their women. He said Grand Ronde is no different from others he has experienced.

"I think Tribal people have honored women in their history," said Hancock. "I think putting the woman on the statue is just another example of how Tribal people honor their women members."

The Tribe's Veterans' Ad Hoc Memorial Committee is conducting fundraisers in hopes of gathering the nearly \$300,000 that will be needed to complete the project by Memorial Day 2003.

Donations have been coming in from the Grand Ronde Tribal Council, Veterans, Veterans' groups and organizations and private families.

A banquet dinner and fundraising auction is planned for Tuesday, March 27, 2001 in Willamina at the VFW Hall.



Grand Ronde Tribal member and Veteran Steve Bobb, a well-known local artist who lives in Willamina, is the project's designer. Bobb is also a member of the Tribe's Veteran's Ad Hoc Memorial Committee.

