

Through Elders' Eyes



Photos by Brent Merrill

Educator — Grand Ronde Tribal Social Services Director Anthony Gagliardo informed participants about how important the subject of Elder abuse really is.

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"I know that from time to time, some of us have been taken advantage of," said Tribal Elder Leon "Chips" Tom to the participants. "Maybe not intentionally or maybe by accident, but we have all been there before."

Tom said abuse can be subtle.

"I know when someone makes a commitment or offers to take you to the doctor, shopping or just stop by to visit and spend some time with you — and then they don't show up — it hurts," said Tom. "You feel disrespect, not value. As we grow older we become more dependent and less independent. Sometimes its tough to say no to the people we love when we are asked to loan money or maybe to baby-sit our grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

Despite the seriousness of the subject, Tom brought some humor to the crowd.

"And I know that from experience I don't move as fast as the little ones do or near as well as I used to," said Tom amid chuckles from other Elders who know how he feels. "I admire some of the Elders that I see still babysitting, because I know that sometimes just watching children with all their energy wears me out."

Tribal Elder Nancy Wall said she saw Elder abuse first hand in nursing homes that she worked in over

the years. She painfully recalled times of watching nursing home staff abuse Elders just by ignoring them — leaving them to cry out for someone's attention.

"I've had 26 years of experience in nursing homes and I have seen aides that have abused the Elders," said Wall. "It was not physical; it was mostly mental because they would talk over the person like they weren't even there. Many times if they wanted water or to go to the bathroom and were confined to a wheelchair, they would just ignore them and go on their way. That is the kind of abuse that really bothers me. As far as physical abuse — I'm sure the Elders are afraid of retaliation if they reported it themselves. We really need to be watching out for any physical marks that we see."

Grand Ronde Tribal Elders Sharon Hanson, Cherie Butler and Robert Schmid joined Tom and Wall on the panel. Warm Springs Tribal Elder Adeline Miller also joined the Grand Ronde Elders.

State Attorney General Hardy Meyers was interviewed prior to his speaking engagement at the conference and said Elder abuse is a crime. Meyers drew a comparison to the days when even spousal abuse was not reported and if it was reported, the general perception was that it should be worked out within the family.

Many times this type of ignorance



Staff Participation — Members of the Tribe's Social Services department attend this year's Elder abuse conference to learn what to watch for while working with Elders.

cost people their lives.

Meyers said times are changing and so are people's perceptions of what abuse is and how it should be handled.

"Yes, I absolutely agree that this is an important subject," said Meyers. "I think it is sometimes a difficult subject for people to confront, but I think it is important to recognize that what we are talking about what ordinarily is criminal conduct — it is not private conduct. There is a growing community interest in bringing to light and stopping that conduct. I think that one of the sad facts about Elder abuse — in particular, financial Elder abuse — the perpetrators are often family members who have a relationship of trust that is being greatly abused. This is not only abuse of the individual, but of the trust relationship and that is very disheartening.

"In the area of domestic violence, I think we started some years ago with the very widespread view that this was a private matter — that it was not something that other people should be concerned with," said Meyers. "The marital relationship was for the parties to work out. But in that area and the area of Elder abuse, we have made a lot of progress in changing that attitude as we are beginning to accept the fact and getting the community to accept the fact that it is a community concern."

Meyers said he appreciates the Tribe's efforts in helping communities find answers to social problems and for providing the resources that lead to the answers.

"I think very definitely the Tribe has a unique and important role," said Meyers. "I think you put your finger on an important development, which is the ability now to create resources, which cost money. But, again the presence of professional resources of different kinds seems crucial to me and the fact that they are coming into being is a wonderful development."

Bonnie Tom said the conference was a huge success and she was pleased by the turnout.

"I thought it was a wonderful day and it is the kickoff to having our own multidisciplinary team," said Tribal Wellness Component Director Bonnie Tom. "The Elders panel was a great touch and we really enjoyed having the Elders from Warm Springs and Umatilla here with us. Everyone I spoke to loved hearing what the EL-

ders had to say."

Warm Springs Elder Adeline Miller shared her stories of what she does for the Elders in her Tribal community. Miller said even though the body might not be able to do what they did as youngsters, they still remember. And they still play and pick berries in their minds.

"I grew up with an Elder person and the person had a lot to do in my life," said Miller of her youth. "I have seen my grandmother take care of Elder people. She told me to respect all Elders — to listen to them. Then later on, after I had my children I passed that on to my children. To listen, obey the Elders. This I try to pass on to the children. Today, I myself as an Elder, I feel it has paid off because I feel very glad when I see that person go up to an Elder and speak to them. Just go up and walk with them or even talk to them. I have seen this neglect a lot. When I go to an Elder's home — I always pick up another Elder and take them along with me and I was happy to see these two people get together and reminisce. That made them both happy."

Listening to Miller recall her youth makes it easy to see the picture she paints with her memories. The beauty of her creation makes it hard to understand how anyone could abuse an Elder person.

"Sometimes I pick up three or four of the Elders and I fix lunch," said Miller. "I drive them up to the mountains, get out chairs and we sit out there and we eat lunch. We were acting like we were picking huckleberries. And, they point out to the place where they used to go at one time. And then when they returned home, they were happy."

Miller urges others to pick up the work that she can no longer do. Her words were emotional and inspiring.

"Today, I do not see that happening because no one has continued that work along that I was doing," said Miller. "If you do this you will feel good. Because we feel that no one cares for us and that our families don't want to be bothered. So they feel 'why should I care for myself?' They don't want to eat — they just have a little snack. Next thing, they are talking to themselves. But, if you keep in touch with them a lot then you can keep them out of doing things like that."



Photo by Brent Merrill

Standing Room Only — This year's conference drew a better than expected turnout. Participants came from all over the state and several Tribes were represented. State Attorney General Hardy Meyers was one of this year's participants and he took the opportunity to remind everyone that Elder abuse is a crime.