

Tribal Council Hears Public Works Report At February General Council Meeting

■ Questions on Tribal land acquisition and the Grand Ronde road-widening project punctuate the meeting.

By Ron Karten

The February General Council meeting was held on Sunday, February 1, at the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde. Here are the highlights:

Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy called the meeting to order; Tribal Council member Jan D. Reibach offered the invocation.

Public Works Director and Tribal member John Mercier described the wide range of philosophies, jobs and employees that keep Tribal facilities open to the public.

"We have many mission statements," he said, quickly showing one after the other on the overhead projector that made up the visual part of the presentation. They included providing a "safe and healthy environment" to all who visit and use Tribal facilities. They utilized "a team approach." They put "people first." They valued the Tribe's human resources. And they focused on "respect—we respect everyone and we expect everyone to respect our facilities." And while all statements of mission appeared worthy of ultimate inclusion, Mercier promised that the department would in the future put together one as the department's official mission statement.

Twenty seven staff positions do the work of the department, said Mercier, including four managers, six maintenance technicians, 12 housekeepers, two cemetery caretakers and two seasonal groundskeepers. Twenty five are Tribal members.

Those workers are responsible for 39 buildings, including 18 that are open to the public and/or serve as offices or for other public functions, seven have limited use, four are for storage, four are shops and six remain vacant and boarded up.

Of those, 13 are new construction, 11 are modulars, eight are remodels, and seven are old construction.

"I can't emphasize enough our adherence to the land," said Mercier, and described the Tribe's strategy for managing its 1,008 acres in Grand Ronde. One hundred-150 acres are intensively managed. Two hundred acres are managed on a limited basis. Sixty are managed by Spirit Mountain Casino. And the rest are only managed on an "as needed" basis.

Questions came up seeking clarification on the Tribe's land acquisition policy. Tribal member and Tribal Land Management Coordinator Mike Wilson reported that the Tribe is continuously pursuing opportunities to purchase land—particularly in the core areas of Grand Ronde Road and along Highway 18—for future uses. "We've continually outgrown our plans," said Wilson.

Responding to a question wondering why the Tribe purchases property long before any use for it has been decided, the Tribe's General Manager Cliff Adams said, "(Some) people are asking six to 10 times what the land is worth." If the Tribe finds a property within the core areas that is reasonably priced, the Tribe takes advantage. "We want to be proactive," said Adams.

In regard to this, the Public Works Department continues to work on a Comprehensive Plan for the Tribe. One

put forth a few years ago never was accepted by Tribal Council, said Mercier.

Challenges for the department include managing the increased use of facilities and the infrastructure supporting it; the growing complexity of building systems such as sound but also including sophisticated heating and cooling units; the staffing for many new events, multiple shifts, preventing damage and misuse of property; educating the public and seeking its support.

Illegal dumping, both at the recycling area and on reservation woodlands, names the most difficult and immediate of problems for the department. As recently as the night before the meeting Mercier had a call from an unnamed Tribal member reporting a pile of garbage dumped in the Tribal woods.

"The Tribe is extremely generous in



Tribal Land Management Coordinator and Tribal member Mike Wilson

allowing Tribal lands to be used by the public," said Mercier. "A beautiful community," he said, is the department's "hugest challenge."

Door prize winners included \$50 winners: Tribal members Priscilla Lopez, Jessie Brann and Susan Reyes. Tribal Member Jeffrey Brooks won the \$100 prize.

Tribal Staff Attorney Deneen Aubertin-Keller won a Valentine's Day Basket in a drawing benefiting Elders' Committee programs.

Tribal Elder Betty Bly asked when the Tribe is going to start widening Grand Ronde Road. The plans are 90 percent complete, according to the



General Council Presentation—Public Works Director and Tribal member John Mercier described the jobs and facilities the department handles day-to-day for the Tribe.

Tribe's Engineer Eric Scott. "We hope to start on the southern part (of the project) this summer," he said.

A question came up about the possibility of re-routing the many trucks that now barrel down Grand Ronde Road. Unfortunately, according to Mercier, the state Department of Transportation's plans to widen Route 22, an alternate route, have been set back by a few years, so other than the widening project on Grand Ronde Road, and the bike and pedestrian paths slated to come with it, relief from the trucks remains years in the future.

Tribal member Linda Bean Olson asked about salary increases for Tribal Council members. Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy reported a 4.1 percent cost of living increase, which all Tribal employees received. Council members also received an additional four percent salary increase, the first increase in four years for Tribal Council members, according to Tribal Council member Jan D. Reibach.

Tribal member and Director of the Spirit Mountain Community Fund Angie Blackwell, expressed her disappointment with a staffing decision by the Tribal Council for the Community Fund's board and apologized for a previous outburst about the decision.

Olson said that election rule changes leave too little time to campaign. The new rule limits campaigning to 45 days between Tribal Council nominations and the vote.

She asked for the dollar amount being spent by the Tribe for coffee, tea and sundries supplied free to Tribal employees and guests.

She also said that the Housing Department needs extra staff to take care of the Tribe's housing facilities.

Tribal member Maxine Leno sought better conditions for Tribal physicians, including eating and sleeping facilities

at the clinic. She also asked that physicians receive permanent appointments and raises in pay.

Tribal member Shawn Hostler sought information about the Tribal language program currently funded for pre-schoolers. Although the Culture Department had submitted an \$800,000 annual price tag for the language classes to be funded through high school (when students are enrolled in the classes in every grade), Tribal Council is not yet ready to commit to that. However, the council is seeking a proposal for a first grade class so that those having had the Chinuk Wawa lessons in pre-school will be able to continue their studies.

"We won't be a Tribe without certain components," said Hostler, referring to the language classes.

"There will always be a Tribe," said Reyn Leno.

"It's futile to go part of the way," said Culture Department Director June Olson. "If classes stop, kids will forget everything they have learned."

Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker-Robertson presented a plaque to Tribal youth Julian Rock for returning to Tribal Council a money order with substantial value. The plaque said in part: "Your Tribe and your Tribal Council acknowledge you for your honesty and integrity."

"We're very proud of the work that you're doing raising your children to be honest citizens," said Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy to the boy's parents.

Kennedy also noted that Tribal member Tim Holmes and Michaelle Kimsey, wife of Tribal Elder Marvin Kimsey, were in the hospital in very serious condition and that Tribal members Janelle Haller and Shelly Kent also faced serious medical problems. Holmes was recovering well as *Smoke Signals* went to press, but sadly, Michaelle Kimsey, long a force in the life of the Tribal community, and on the Tribe's Rodeo Committee, passed away.