

# School Deaths Spotlight Troubled Tribal Conditions

■ Grand Ronde gift will help Red Lake Chippewa families cope.

By Ron Karten

The Tribal Council of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde has contributed \$1,000 to the Tribal Council of The Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians in the wake of the school shooting there that ended ten lives and left the lives of a many more injured in the shooting hanging in the balance.

"When I saw it on TV," said Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker-Robertson, "I was so shocked I had tears in my eyes."

She wanted to help and brought the idea to Tribal Council, which followed her lead and unanimously voted to send the money. "Anything we could do to help them, I think, would be a good thing," she said.

Sending it Tribal Council to Tribal Council was "more personal" than a gift to the fund opened up for the purpose, said Tribal Council member Buddy West.

The letter accompanying the check said simply, "to help your People through the difficult times ahead."

The shooting by a disaffected young Tribal member, Jeff Weise, 16, first took the boy's grandfather, Red Lake Tribal member and Police Sergeant Daryl Lussier, 58, and Lussier's companion, Michelle Sigana, 32. Wiese had been living at their home.

By one report, Lussier was more than a decent cop. He was "a super sweet guy," said first cousin Leon Cook, Director of Bemidji State University's American Indian Resource Center, "not the kind of cop that roughs you up, just the opposite."

The spree then moved from their home to the school.

The boy took his grandfather's guns and bullets and bullet proof vest. He took his grandfather's police patrol car.

At school, he is reported to have smiled and waved as he killed those around him. He was said to have asked one boy, reportedly a friend, if he believed in God, before killing him. He aimed for the face in many instances, and at close range.

The shooting opened another round

of soul searching and hand wringing across the nation, this time focusing on the Red Lake community that was home to the boy and his victims.

The soul searching went all the way up to the White House, where the President, after criticism that he had

taken place, a letter of commiseration arrived. An emissary of the Canadian government traveled to Red Lake to show support and offer help to Tribal members whose ancestral lands cross the U.S./Canada border.

Analyses of what happened and what

website of Red Lake Net News (www.rlnn.com), an independent news site funded by the Red Lake Chippewas. Williams is a practicing psychotherapist in New York City.

The NRA's first Vice President, Sandra S. Froman, told the Associated Press that in order to prevent such tragedies, teachers should have guns.

According to an Associated Press report, half of Red Lake Tribal girls and 20 percent of Tribal boys have attempted suicide, nearly triple the rate for the state as a whole.

The tragedy began to unfold before the first bullet was fired around 3 p.m. on March 20, 2005. It began before the boy's father committed suicide, four years earlier, reportedly after a day-long standoff with Tribal police. The boy's grandfather and one of his first victims was even then a long time member of that police force. It began to unfold before the boy's mother landed in a nursing home with brain damage the result of a drunken driving accident that also killed his cousin. One relative was reported to say that even before the shooting, the boy's mother and stepfather drank too much and left the boy alone too often.

Well before the event, a member of the community remembered Wiese standing alone by the fence at school staring into space. Nobody came by to join him.

While the press and community members assessed Wiese as a stereotype loner, the Federal Bureau of Investigation at press time had just arrested Louis Jourdain, son of the Tribal Chairman, Floyd Jourdain Jr., and hinted that others may have known about or helped plan the attack.

Hundreds were on hand for the funerals of the dead: Daryl Lussier, 58, Michelle Sigana, 31, Security Guard Derrick Brun, 28, Teacher Neva Rogers, 62, and students, all 15, Chanelle Rosebear, Alicia White, Chase Lussier, Thurlene Stillday and Dewayne Lewis. ■



**Need For Healing** — The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon's Tribal Council reached out to the members of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians last week with a \$1,000 donation from Tribal Council to Tribal Council.

Photo courtesy of the Associated Press

not publicly acknowledged the tragedy, said a week later in his radio address, "...we must continue to foster a culture that affirms life and provides love, and helps our young people build character."

None of the President's "No Child Left Behind" funding was earmarked for Tribes, according to Patty Talahongva, host and producer of *Native America Calling* and former President of the Native American Journalists Association.

Offers of help after the tragedy came in the form of money and counselors for family members and the community. From the mayor of a German town where a similar shooting had

should be done to prevent another such instance came from all over.

"Anthropologists can tell us that at one time, all races of people were 'hunter/gatherers,' wrote Liz Gray in a commentary in *Native American Times*. "It has also been proven that the hunter/gatherer society only had to work 20 hours a week to sustain themselves. The remainder of that time included socializing. And our children, usually, were by our side."

"People at large should wake up from their collective denial and understand that any one of us under the wrong conditions can 'lose' it and go berserk," wrote Gibbs A. Williams, Ph.D., who sent his analysis for publication on the



Photo by Toby McClary

**Visual** — Christine Walters, of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), recently visited Grand Ronde to recruit students to the Institute. According to Walters, the IAIA is more than just a school. The Institute offers two and four-year degrees in visual communications, creative writing, museum studies and studio arts. For more information about the IAIA, contact the Tribe's Education Program or Walters at 505-424-2329.



Photo by Toby McClary

**Jumper** — Tribal member Landon Bobb, 9, right, struts his stuff as part of the Willamina Youth Basketball team. In this picture, the team was playing at Dayton. Tribal member John Mercier coached and his son, Tribal member Kalim, also played for the Willamina team.