

Meth Watch: A Conversation Draws Many

■ Community is torn by the meth trade in area but there is little agreement about approaches to solving it.

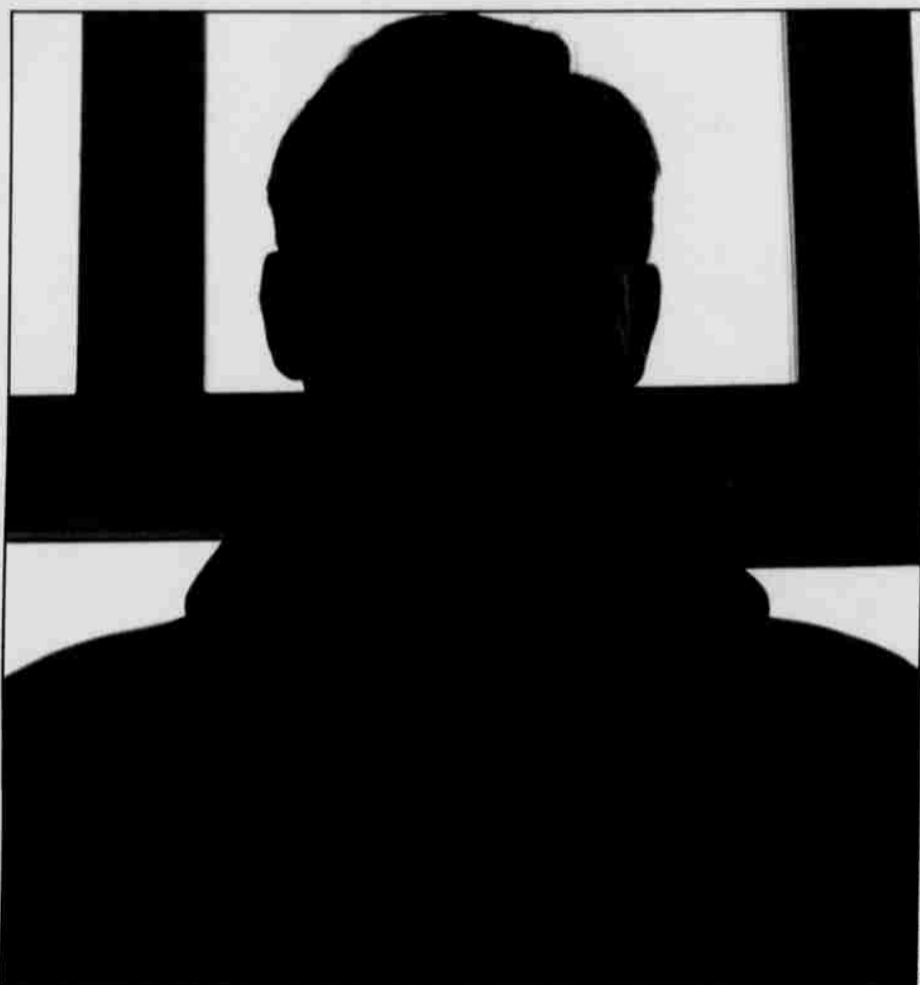


Photo by Toby McClary

Gary, (Cherokee), shown here in shadow, was a meth user for 15 years before entering the local Narcotics Anonymous group in Grand Ronde four months ago.

"I go to every single meeting," he said. "I love that they help me stay clean."

His father was nicknamed, 'Speedy,' and also spent a lot of his adult life under the sway of meth, but about 10 years ago, kicked it and no longer even has a glass of beer. Five years ago, Gary, still doing meth, visited his dad in San Diego, and while his dad never said anything, Gary said, "I could tell he was concerned and that weighed on me."

Soon after, Gary quit for the first time, and in the year and a half that he was clean, he built up a successful painting/contracting business. But the pressure drove him back to meth. "I started doing more dope so I could do more work so I could do more dope," he said. "I bought my wife all kinds of things but I didn't realize that all she wanted was me, time with me."

He lost it all to meth — the business, the woman of his life, his children — and now he is starting over. Four months clean. And he believes in it. "The only reason I'm doing this (photograph)," he said, "is to bring more people into NA."

And he is ready to work again.

By Ron Karten

In California, police spotted a guy on fire running down the street, according to Polk County Sheriff's Office Detective Michael S. Holsapple. It was a pretty sure sign that another meth lab had gone up in flames. "They didn't catch the guy," said Holsapple, "but they found the lab nearby."

This was one of the highlights at a recent public meeting on the subject of methamphetamines (otherwise known as "meth" or "crank") in the community, hosted by the Tribal Social Services Department.

With 80 percent of the Tribe's foster care cases believed to be a side effect of meth production and use, the meeting — the first of many planned — came amid a national outcry about a problem that has now crossed the country.

This first in a series of town meetings on the subject was joined later in the month by a Tribal Council resolution establishing a Grand Ronde Community Methamphetamine Awareness Team and another approving development of a grant to focus on the local meth problem.

"A group of our staff have been meeting to formalize a community awareness team to deal with this," said Dave Fullerton, Manager of the Social Services Department. "We have been and

are seeing a huge increase in the use and addiction rates and the family problems that result."

News reports from *The Oregonian* in Portland and the *Salem Statesman Journal* also have remarked the growth of this epidemic that started here on the west coast more than a decade ago, but now has moved all the way across the country, taking with it the trademark waste in lives and families, the poisoning of buildings where meth is manufactured and a disregard for the environment where wastes often are dumped.

The attendant crime includes addicts stealing to raise money for the drug. Most identity thefts are attributed to meth manufacturers or users, as are many forgeries and burglaries.

Meth is often manufactured in apartments or motel rooms, and the chemicals used in the process are deadly. The buildings or forests or wherever the wastes are left behind become hazardous waste sites. Because identified sites cost building owners upwards of \$5,000 to clean, many do not report apartments abandoned by meth manufacturers; instead they hire individuals not trained in hazardous waste cleanup to get the place ready for the next tenant. Such decisions put both

the cleaners and the next tenants at risk.

Damage also is done to family members both through the violence coming from a meth-addled psyche and the dangers posed to children when forced to live in a meth lab. Children can be left to their own devices for days at a time in these dangerous environments when those in charge are getting high.

"This has a high impact for children," said Larry Hellie, a Human Resources Consultant leading the meeting. He called drug abuse prevention his "avocation."

"The only way to find these labs is community help," said Detective Holsapple, who noted that budget cuts have eliminated the drug team in Polk County.

He and Hellie with the help of a couple videos described the attributes of both meth addicts and meth manufacturers, the kinds of materials that will be around when meth is being cooked and the kind of activities that will mark a residence being used as a meth manufacturing facility.

"I really think that by pulling communities together, you can solve problems like this," said Jennifer J. Martin. Martin is an Assistant U.S. Attorney who prosecutes principally drug offenses.

Still, the experience expressed by

drug cases are investigated.

Police described budget cutbacks that have left them with too few officers to respond to too many calls in a timely way, a judicial system that may send users home the next morning and a special fund to clean up meth labs "that is usually empty," according to Detective Holsapple.

"There is a public perception that nothing is happening," he said.

Tribal member Joyce Kirk, formerly an Administrative Assistant with the Tribal Social Services Department, knows the problem first hand on a number of levels. In Klamath Falls, she and her husband, Joe Kirk (Klamath), who still works in the Social Services Department, lived next door to an apartment in Klamath Falls that was used to manufacture meth.

She described the dealing activity as constant from the time the sun went down until it came up again in the morning. She described a police department that declined to act on numerous calls by Kirk and other neighbors. She described an apartment, that when finally abandoned, held all the deadly remnants of the manufacturing process, and a landlord that sent a regular cleaning lady in to clean what is legally defined as a hazardous waste site, so that the apartment's next tenants were surely affected by contami-

"How do we make this not about enforcement but about a community effort? Meth is the presenting issue. The real issue is, how do we develop a healthy community, everybody working together to build a healthy community."

**~ Angie Blackwell
Tribal Council Member**

some in the Grand Ronde community did not reflect confidence in the official effort.

"I have a daughter who was totally clean for 15 years," said one mother in attendance. (Neither she nor her daughter are named for their safety.) The daughter, a meth addict clean for 15 years, fell off the wagon for a year, but then burned all her bridges to get off the stuff again. "She was very serious about staying clean," said her mom. "She stopped using and gave the names and addresses of all the dealers she knew to the police 'to get it out of Willamina.'"

Understanding the risks of turning names into the police, U.S. Assistant Attorney Martin called the daughter's actions, "a very courageous and important thing to do."

"Not one thing was done," the mother concluded. "Today, they snub her because she could give them dealers but she didn't know where they cooked the stuff."

"Not here," said Polk County Sergeant Nathan Goldberg.

"Yes, here," said the mom.

Goldberg added later that while informants may feel slighted after giving information, there may be a lot of reasons why nobody was immediately arrested, not least of which is the way

nants that remained.

But from her time in Social Services, Kirk also sees the failure of the community to help addicts, even when they ask for it.

"I see no health treatment, no after-care, no assistance, no help. There's nowhere for them to go. They go back with the same people and they go right back to using, and we don't do anything about it."

She described addicts coming to the Tribe's Social Services Department for help and having to face endless waits for a bed at a rehab facility. "We send our clients to NARA (Native American Rehabilitation Association) but they're not getting what they need. There's a lack of bed space. Six weeks later, they haven't found a bed for them."

The crisis we see today has been a century in coming, according to Hellie. Amphetamines were first synthesized in 1893. Soldiers have used a form of it in most wars to stay alert for long periods of time, and they continue to use it in Iraq today. In the 1950s, it gained fame as the housewife's miracle drug, and one form or another has long been used for weight loss.

See METH
on page 7