

Meth Watch: A Conversation Draws Many

METH continued
from page 6

In 1972, the federal government first regulated amphetamines as a narcotic and the jails have been filling up with drug users ever since.

In addition to neighborhood watches, strategies for solving the problem include *The Oregonian's* report that suggested keeping closer tabs on the few major international manufacturers of ephedrine and pseudoephedrin. Found in most cold remedies, these are the operative chemicals in meth.

At the meeting, Hellie said that with 80 percent of Oregon's meth believed to be coming from Mexico and California, stopping Oregon meth labs will merely shift supply sources, but the law keeping the operative chemicals behind the counter does have some important, if limited, benefits.

While nobody is assuming prevention laws are either stopping or even slowing the spread of meth, driving the manufacturers out of state does mean that many Oregon children will never have to live in a home that doubles as a meth manufacturing plant.

This year in Salem, legislation has been introduced to require law enforcement agencies to notify communities when convicted meth cooks move into the neighborhood. In Washington, D.C., Oregon legislators have introduced two meth fighting bills.

Since 1989, according to a recent article in the *Hillsboro Argus*, 1,600 jurisdictions around the country have chosen to send non-violent drug offenders — like some meth abusers — to treatment instead of jail. Just such a program, run through so-called "Drug Courts," is now beginning in Washington County. It has been funded with \$60,000, enough to cover the 12-18-month treatment for 10 men and 10 women. The county also is seek-



Photo by Ron Karten

Prevention — Larry Hellie, left, a Human Resources Consultant who specializes in drug abuse prevention in his personal time and Jennifer J. Martin, an Assistant U.S. Attorney who prosecutes drug cases, spoke about meth at a community meeting.

ing a federal grant to cover a larger number of people.

At the moment, the concept of drug courts for even a part of the meth community faces the same lack of funding that has been a recurring source of failure in this effort almost from go. But there are a lot of ways that experts slice the numbers and digest the strategies.

For Hellie, the difference in costs for locking up an offender or sending them through treatment is a giant barrier. The state pays \$60-plus/day (\$21,900-plus/year) to lock up a drug offender, or \$250-1,000/day (\$91,250-365,000/year) to treat one in a private sector in-patient facility.

At the Oregon Department of Corrections, the cost per inmate per day is \$64 (\$23,360/year), according to DOC spokeswoman Perrin Damon,

and treatment programs are included in that cost. "That's the average of cost of care including programs," she said, "whether an inmate takes advantage of them or not."

Hellie said in conversation after the meeting that the DOC treatment program is "usually confined to last 60 days before release" and isn't going to do the job.

In Washington County, where the drug courts are starting, the *Hillsboro Argus* reported that the annual cost of incarcerating a drug offender is \$60,000/year while drug court treatment amounts to \$3,000-4,000/person. But again, Hellie cautioned that the drug court was not going to do the job.

"Drug court money is "just being pissed away," said Hellie. "Twelve-step programs and the like have a pretty good chance with alcohol and even co-

caine and heroin," he said. "Meth is entirely different. It's not amenable to a drug court program. The attraction of meth is too overwhelming for the majority of people." But, he said, "for non-violent, young offenders, I'd rather see them in drug court."

Still, in conversation after the event, Hellie noted, "Addiction is clearly a medical problem."

"We have a system in place that fails on its own terms. (The medical and legal issues) are mutually exclusive. We don't have a system that realistically deals with the total issue."

"Politicians want to turn a blind eye to the issue because it requires much deeper thought than most of those people are capable of."

"The legal system is not set up to address (many of the issues) that contribute to meth abuse," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Martin.

Within this world of divergent opinions on matters as straightforward as costs and as muddled as the right mix of treatment, enforcement and prevention, the Tribe is moving forward with plans of its own.

"How do we make this not about enforcement but about a community effort?" asked Tribal Council member Angie Blackwell, one of the driving forces behind the Tribe's local meth efforts. "Meth is the presenting issue," she said. "The real issue is, how do we develop a healthy community, everybody working together to build a healthy community."

Because of the larger societal failure to deal effectively with this issue, Tribal Council selected meth prevention as the focus of an upcoming Tribal grant application to the Administration for Native Americans.

The planned project will be an inter-departmental and community effort to address this problem, according to Kim Ray Rogers, Tribal Planning and Grants Manager. ■

Warriors' Medal Of Valor Crosses The Country

■ Marshall Tall Eagle Serna is "restoring honor to our people."



Photo by Brent Merrill

By Ron Karten

Marshall Tall Eagle Serna (Apache), an Army Master Sergeant who served in Saigon during the Vietnam War, and his wife, Lauretta, aim to give a Warriors' Medal of Valor to every living Veteran and every active duty soldier in the country.

They also go to police, firefighters and others that have gone "above and beyond in community service," said Tribal Elder Gene LaBonte, President of the Northwest Indian Veter-

ans Association (NIVA) and the Grand Ronde Honor Guard, who has participated in giving out these medals.

LaBonte also has distributed the medals to Governor Ted Kulongoski, to two different National Guard generals, to Jim Willis, Oregon Director of Veterans Affairs and to Arthur Jackson, an Oregon Medal of Honor recipient.

"We go to Veterans funerals to present the Colors, and we present these medals to the families of the deceased if they have not received one," said LaBonte.

The mission started at the 2002 Grand Ronde Veterans' Pow-wow, said Serna. "The Creator gave me a vision of honoring our Veterans in a military way."

Since then, he has designed and minted thousands of medals. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde purchased 300 of them at \$10 each for NIVA, where LaBonte and other Vets picked up the ball. (See *Smoke Signals* 8/1/04).

There currently are 5,000-7,000 out there, said Serna.

"We are headed up to Alaska to

present medals to about 250 active military personnel at the Ketchikan Coast Guard Station for a June 2 presentation," he said.

The Sernas also have been invited to England to give medals to American Veterans living there. They are fund-raising for that trip now.

"We'll send a free medal to all active duty soldiers in a combat zone," said Serna, a man without a big bank account behind him. "I know in my heart if I got addresses for \$125,000 worth of medals, I know the money would be there. Every time we get low on funds, somebody is there with the money."

This is the first medal minted by Tribal people for Veterans, according to Serna, and though there are no regulations for Native-issued medals, Serna said, "We are seeking to get it authorized by the military."

Without any artistic training, Serna designed the medals himself. He is retailing them for \$24.95 each with the \$10 wholesale price tag for buying 10 or more. Any profits, he said, go to pay for medals already minted, and to defray costs for those still to be made.

Serna has lived his post-military years as a private investigator with the Marion County public defender.

Locally, recipients have included Tribal Council Vice Chair Reyn Leno, Tribal Council member Jan D. Reibach and LaBonte.

"Lot of times it brings tears to your eyes," said LaBonte. "For many of these people, this is the most important medal they have received. Most all of these medalion recipients are like that."

"And lots more people — men and women — are looking for these medals."

"For me," said Reyn Leno, "it completes my feelings as a Veteran to be honored by the United States, now to be honored by your own people."

One Veteran, a Tribal Elder, recalled LaBonte, said when he received the medal that he had known about it when he was just a boy, but didn't know if he'd see it before he passed on.

Even though the medal was not physically created until 2002.