

General Council Meets In Eugene

■ Tribal member enrollment is the top issue for more than 100 people.

By Ron Karten

The April General Council meeting was held on Sunday, April 3rd, at the Valley River Inn in Eugene. Following the Portland meeting in February, this was the second time that the Tribal Council has met outside of Grand Ronde. Here are the highlights:

Tribal Vice Chair Reyn Leno called the meeting to order. Tribal Elder and council member Wesley "Buddy" West offered the invocation.

West announced before the invocation the unexpected passing of Tribal member Michael Reibach.

Tribal Operations Director Chris Leno, Executive Health Director Michael Watkins and Social Services Manager Dave Fullerton summarized Tribal benefits to the Eugene group. In many cases, services are identical for those living in Grand Ronde and those living in Eugene and beyond, but federal government funding often limits benefits to a six-county area that does not include Eugene.

In Social Services, for example, all Tribal members receive SSI and SSD benefits, youth prevention and Indian Child Welfare services. Grand Ronde and the six-county area Tribal members also receive domestic violence and vocational rehabilitation services not available in Eugene.

Likewise, all Tribal members are entitled to Emergency assistance for rent, utility and special disasters, but only Tribal members in Grand Ronde and the six-county area also receive federal Employment and Training and benefits of the Low Income Energy Housing Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Remarks included many about the track record of United Medical Resources (UMR), the Tribe's self-funded and self-directed health insurance for members and employees. Remarks split almost evenly between those who were satisfied with the barely year old self-insurance program and those who expressed dissatisfaction with the new service.

Benefits are all intended to be the same as those offered previously by insurer ODS Health Plans, said Risk Manager Debby Larsen, who is the Tribal interface with UMR.

To those who complained about the cost of pharmaceuticals or about being reimbursed for expenses, Watkins said that the Tribe's pharmacy has a mail-order program that provides pharmaceuticals by mail at no cost — eliminating even the co-pay to Tribal members. This mail order program is administered directly through the Tribal pharmacy. Other than Elders, those using the Express Scripts mail order program will continue to have a co-pay.

A question came up about more frequent per capita checks, on a quarterly basis, for example. The Tribal Council has talked about that, said Reyn Leno, and is currently investigating how such distributions might affect other programs for Tribal members. It is possible, Leno added, that such a change might need federal approval.

Questions came up about coverage and benefits for the non-Tribal spouses of Tribal Elders. A range of potential problems were discussed.

"What (benefits are available) if an

Elder dies before his non-Tribal spouse turns 55?" asked Tribal Elder Buddy White.

"What about when the Tribal member is not 55 but the non-Tribal spouse is over 55?" asked Tribal Elder Rebecca Crocker.

Tribal member David Lewis sought Tribal support for children, like one of his own, with autistic diseases. "UMR calls it a learning disability," he said, "not a neurologic disorder, which is what it is."

The time and cost needed to work with children with autistic diseases is significant, he said, but by taking advantage of a window of opportunity when the children are young, "in two to four years, many of these kids can come completely out of it. There's about a two-year window of opportunity."

The cost of such treatment — requiring intensive training in speaking and interacting — could cost as much as \$40,000 a year, said Lewis. He asked the Tribe to consider establishing a "special needs fund" for these young Tribal members.

With almost a year's worth of experience with UMR, the Tribe is now ready to consider changes to the plan, said Debbie Larsen, and at next month's Community meetings across the region (see notice on page 3), the Tribe will solicit recommendations for changes.

By far, the largest number of questions and the most emotional comments concerned enrollment. Many of those who have traveled to other General Tribal Council meetings told their stories again here in Eugene and in most cases, comments centered on families split — so that some are considered Tribal members, others in the same family are not — by the 1999 amendment to the Enrollment section of the Tribal Constitution.

Designed to limit membership in a number of ways so that Tribal dollars would go further, the amendment also turned out to divide families in such a way that some children in a family qualify for Tribal membership while others in the same family do not.

"We've been bringing this forward since 1999," said Crocker.

Many expressed concern about the recent discovery of some 35 cases where current Tribal members appear to have been enrolled in error. The families involved received letters from the Tribe to let them know that the cases were being reviewed.

"I would be very angry if it were one of my kids," said Reyn Leno, but he added, "Nothing will happen until all 35 cases have been reviewed (by the Enrollment Committee) and recommendations forwarded to the Tribal Council."

The statement did little to ease concerns from families caught up in the investigation, or some Tribal members who feared that they might be next to be pulled from Tribal rolls.

Discussion followed about ways to solve the problem, while Reyn Leno noted that this is a top priority for the

full Tribal Council.

"Historically, blood quantum was used by the federal government as a tool to disenroll Indians," said David Lewis. Lewis is a University of Oregon Ph.D. student in anthropology. Some Tribes, he said, allow those who work for the Tribe to apply for membership. "We need to look (for models) in our own cultural histories before the feds came along."

(Historically, blood quantum was developed by the federal government in part at least to keep track of Tribes and Tribal members to whom it had treaty obligations. It also was one of the measures by which some Tribes



Brenda Tuomi, Tribal member and Tribal Services Representative for the Eugene Satellite Office

Photo by Ron Karten

were terminated and others denied restoration.

Although there are probably as many exceptions to the rule, for some Tribes, membership came as a result of living in the Tribal community, adopting community beliefs and participating in the daily life of the Tribe.)

A number of Tribal members said that they voted for the amendment in 1999 but would not have if they had known all the implications.

The initial enrollment requirements under the Tribal Constitution required potential Tribal members to have a 1/16th Indian blood quantum and be descended from a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Tribe.

Descent from a member includes lineal descent (parent to child) from any person named on any roll or record of Grand Ronde members prepared by the Department of Interior prior to the effective date of the Constitution (November 30, 1984).

The 1999 Amendment to the Tribal Constitution requires that new enrollees have relinquished membership in another Tribe for one year; possess 1/16th Grand Ronde blood defined as all Indian blood derived from a direct ancestor on the Restoration roll. (The Tribe's Restoration roll includes all those still living who were on the Tribal rolls in 1954 at the time of the Tribe's termination, plus all those added to the rolls in 1983 at the time of the Tribe's Restoration.) In addi-

tion, potential Tribal members must have been born to a parent who was a member of the Tribe at the time of the enrollee's birth and who, unless deceased, was a member of the Grand Ronde Tribe at the time of application for enrollment.

"The problem (with changing the Constitution to let in more members)," said Tribal Secretary June Sell-Sherer, "is that benefits are so reduced that we can't do the job as is. (Proposed changes) would double (the number of existing) members."

While potential changes in Enrollment requirements will certainly be considered by Tribal Council in the near future, many in Eugene agreed that an education campaign helping Tribal members understand this part of the Tribal Constitution should come first.

"We hear nothing of these issues in *Smoke Signals*," said Tribal member Matt Parazoo. Another said that information published in *Smoke Signals* is often too complicated.

"*Smoke Signals* should write to a lower level," said Tribal member Brenda Tuomi, Tribal Services Representative currently staffing the Tribe's Eugene Satellite office. "Most newspapers write to a sixth grade level so everyone can understand it."

Health Director Watkins challenged everybody to make one small change in their lives. "If you make one successfully," he said, "it helps you make others."

Tribal Elder John Darcy expressed gratitude for Tribal programs. "I have basically everything I need," he said. "Without the Tribe, my life would be a lot less than it is."

Drawings were held: Faith Goodman won \$100. Tribal Elders Clarice Ellison and Glenda Davenport and Tribal member Steve Wilson each won \$50.

Reyn Leno reported on a recent Tribal Council meeting with Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski. "It was encouraging for us," he said. "He said he was a person who never says never (about future Grand Ronde Tribal casino opportunities), so he put the ball in our court. We'll have to work with the Mayor and the people of Portland," Leno said.

Leno and Tribal member Jack Giffen Jr. reported that they will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to press the Tribal case for full hunting and fishing rights currently being denied Tribal members.

"We can't hunt on our own hunting grounds," said Giffen.

Tribal Elder Betty Bly reported that her granddaughter, Tribal member Chelsea Faris is going to a national competition for the Future Business Leaders of America, and that her son, Tribal member Archie Bly, has earned his first command and his sixth Silver Star. Bly is Group Commander, Attachment 12, Naval Mine Warfare in Misawa, Japan.

Tribal members may now view approved General Council meeting minutes on the Tribal webpage.

The next Tribal Council General Meeting will be May 1 at 11 a.m. at the Tribal gymnasium in Grand Ronde. It will be combined with a Community meeting held at the same time. ■