



Photo by Brent Merrill

**Work Of Art** — To most people, the flowers around the casino look beautiful, but still, they are just flowers. To the casino team that selects them, puts them in the ground, and takes care of them, they are much more. You may not realize it, but the flowers above are planted as a copy of a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed stretch of stained glass.

## Kirk Stuart And The Grounds Crew Keep Spirit Mountain Casino Colorful

■ More than 40,000 flowers cover the landscape of the casino's grounds.

**By Ron Karten**

It may be hard to see — particularly because nobody is looking for it — but the flowers on the left side of the sidewalk as you head toward the front door of the casino are planted as a copy of a Frank Lloyd Wright stained glass design.

The design comes from a coloring book given to Kirk Stuart, Grounds Keeping Supervisor for the Spirit Mountain Casino.

"We're in a position here where we have free reign to do what we want," said Stuart.

And yet, the casino's grounds crew generally uses "nothing out of the ordinary" in creating its special looks.

It is "the numbers (that) are just staggering," said Stuart.

The department bought 30,000 daffodil and tulip bulbs that were planted last fall for this year's spring colors. It bought 12,500 annuals, including primroses and pansies, that went in in May and will stay through the summer until September or October when the bulbs go in again for next spring, and the Grounds crew gets ready to bring in 2,500 poinsettias for Christmas displays.

It's a group effort, said Stuart. Everybody on the team gets to select something they like. And the team has plenty of experience.

The group includes Tim Trimpe (five years), Zack Harmon (just started), Becky Fox (two years), Kevin England (five years), Stephen Deek (six years), Shirley Stuthert (seven years) Paul Ross (nine years) and temporary staffer Donna Curtis. Stuart himself is four years on the job.

"I feel very fortunate to work with the people I do," he said.

Last year, the crew tried a swirling pattern for the flowers, but Stuart said that it didn't work out as planned

because the design got lost as the flowers grew.

Two years ago, the crew planted flowers to represent an Indian blanket design, "a series of half triangles," said Stuart. "The straight lines really worked so we did that again this year."

"At Legends," said Stuart, "they try to have food you can't buy at any diner, and we try to do the same thing

for 75 percent of the installation.

Twenty-five percent of the plants in the casino are artificial silk plants, said Stuart, but many think it's all real.

There are about 500 plants throughout the casino, "depending on what we have around Martha Jane," he said, referring to the bronze sculptures of Tribal Elder Martha Jane Sands and her granddaughter, Gertrude, now

the work of the grounds crew, it is usually only elderly women gardeners who stop and chat about the work, said Stuart.

Flowers may be the most obvious work that the crew takes care of, but as Stuart said, "Basically, if it's outside, it's ours."

Pruning and maintaining trees and shrubs is a related effort, but keeping the parking lots clean, including snow and ice removal, are also part of the job.

"Daily, the crew picks up trash on more than 50 acres of parking lots, they mow the lawns, paint street lines, fertilize and landscape around the Grand Ronde Station and Human Resources building.

The crew has a greenhouse and office up from the convenience store by the RV parking lot. Plants and flowers are started there, and odd or rare species are nurtured.

Last year, plants supplier, Alderbrook Gardens in Dayton, came up with a rare curcuma plant. "Nobody knew what it was," said Stuart. Ultimately, the bloom died out and the crew is still hoping to get it to bloom again in the greenhouse.

"I sold him a bunch of baby tears one time," said Leslie Overgard, whose family owns Alderbrook Gardens. He propagated so many in his greenhouse that he was offering them back to me. Same thing with spider plants."

"One year, he wanted lavender poinsettias for the Christmas season," she said. "They're not so popular so I had to go all over the U.S. and Canada to find them." ■



**Starting Lineup** — Grounds crew among their flowers include, from left, Becky Fox, Tim Trimpe, Paul Ross, Zack Harmon, Shirley Stuthert, Stephen Deek, Kevin England, Donna Curtis and Kirk Stuart.



with flowers."

Inside the casino, where sunlight is scarce, the crew nevertheless manages to include live plants and trees

sitting outside Legends Restaurant. "I feel like we're honoring them with our flowers."

While everybody certainly notices