

September General Council Meeting Ends Summer Drought

■ Gaming and the redesigned Tribal webpage took center stage.

By Ron Karten

The September General Council meeting was held on Sunday, September 10, at the Community Center in Grand Ronde. Here are the highlights:

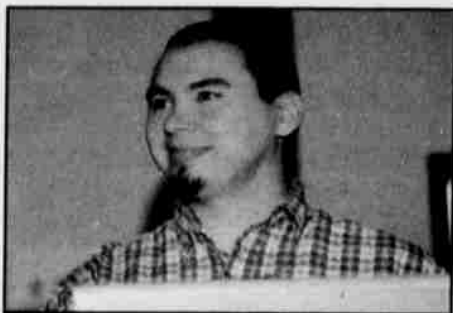
Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy called the meeting to order; Tribal Council member Jan Reibach offered the invocation.

Spirit Mountain Casino Slots Manager Mike Colton and Chief Financial Officer Roy Rhode presented an update on the Tribe's gaming arm.

Slots and table game revenues for the week since The Peak opened in the casino have each increased by 30 percent or more, said Colton.

The casino staff did "an awesome job" in preparing The Peak for opening, said Rhode, standing in for General Manager and Tribal Elder Randy Dugger. "Many worked extra hours, others changed shifts to make it all possible."

Overall operations, said Rhode, as



Tribal member & Web Designer Willie Mercier

of August 31, are \$1.7 million above the projected income for this period, and 12 percent above the same period last year. He attributed much of the gains to increased Ticket In/Ticket Out business.

"The revenues are up," he said, "and it looks like they'll keep going up."

Tribal member and Web Designer Willie Mercier introduced the Tribe's redesigned website.

"It's a place to showcase what there is to do out here," said Mercier. "It says, 'we're not just a casino.'"

And it is more than a tour guide. The Culture Department's "Our Story" section, profiled in the September 1st issue of *Smoke Signals*, is the centerpiece with hundreds of pages of documents, writings, as well as video and still photography.

But the website now includes Grand Ronde news from both *Smoke Signals* and the rest of the local press. There is information about the community, the Tribal Council, employment opportunities and a department by department look at Tribal government. It also includes a calendar of events that Mercier said is available for all Tribal members. Contribute to the calendar with your events by contacting Dakota Whitecloud in the Tribal Council office or Siobhan Taylor in Public Affairs.

Smoke Signals Staff Writer Ron

Karten, Tribal Elder Janet Phillips and Tribal Elder Linda LaChance each won \$50 in the door prize drawings. Tribal Elder Pat Allen won \$100.

Winners of the Tribal election were congratulated many times and Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy said, "Thanks to Jan (Reibach, who did not stand for re-election as a Tribal Council member) and a happy retirement."

Reibach named kindness, forgiveness and "let people be people" as values he respects. "Sometimes, we'll fight and scratch to find our place in life," he said. And later: "It's a miracle in itself that you allowed somebody as simple as myself to serve."

The next General Tribal Council meeting will be held in Grand Ronde on October 8 at 11 a.m. in the Community Center. The date is a week after the first Sunday, as it is every year in October, to avoid a conflict with the opening of hunting season. ■

Spirit Mountain Casino Opens "The Peak"

THE PEAK continued from front page

Jerry West, "and we're in line for some products that have not been approved yet."

Fourteen machines in "The Peak" are from other parts of the casino, said Colton, and all of the table games that previously were on the main floor of the casino are now in "The Peak."

Table games remain a feature in the non-smoking room.

The casino added "fewer than 20 people overall," to increase staff enough to cover the redesigned room, said Dugger.

Through the Spirit Mountain Gaming, Inc., (SMGI) board, the Tribe initiated Compact negotiations with the Governor's office in 2004 to increase the number of slot machines in the casino. Negotiations were 2-1/2 years in process, said Tribal Council member Jack Giffen, Jr.

The agreement was approved by the federal Department of the Interior a month later, and in May, was read into the Federal Register, when the agreement became official.

Work began on planning "The Peak" redesign in March, as soon

as the state signed off on the plan, said Dugger.

"It was an intergovernmental

of Transportation, he said as an example, wanted agreement from the Tribe that "we be partners" on



▲ The traditional ribbon-cutting ceremony for Spirit Mountain Casino's newest gaming area, "The Peak," was held on Friday, September 1. "The Peak" is located in the room of the old Bingo Hall and is expected to uplift casino revenues by \$12 to \$15 million per year. Here, Spirit Mountain Casino General Manager Randy Dugger holds the ribbon as SMGI Board Vice Chair Reyn Leno officially opens the new gaming area.

agreement," added Dugger. "It describes who's responsible for what. We have to (reach agreement on) whatever jurisdictional issues come up." The Oregon Department

upcoming road projects serving the casino. "Basically, it's the same as we had before, updated to reflect changes in operation, the number of games we have and the number

of slot machines."

Eagle Beak Drummers opened the event and accompanied the entrance of the Grand Ronde Honor Guard.

"I was four when we were terminated," said SMGI Board Vice Chair Reyn Leno. "We were a Tribe with no land, but we never stopped believing in ourselves as a people. Now, we have another chapter in our book."

With Dugger standing by, Leno cut the ceremonial ribbon.

Portland-based Howard S. Wright Construction Company was general contractor for the project. Portland-based Dynallectric did the wiring. And Kent, Washington-based New Image did the design and signage for the project.

The promo at the casino entrance said, "The Peak. Get ready for an uplifting experience."

Dugger estimated that the new room will uplift casino revenues by \$12 to \$15 million a year.

Plans for a new bingo room combined with major convention facilities are underway.

"It's ok, so far," said a gamer sitting at a machine when the ceremony concluded. She focused on the screen. "Especially when the bonus came up." ■



The Grand Ronde Honor Guard and Tribal Elder and former Tribal Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison (in red) were on hand to open "The Peak."



SMGI Board Vice Chair and Tribal Council member Reyn Leno introduced Tribal Council and SMGI Board members at the beginning of the opening ceremony.

Photos by Toby McClary