

Grand Ronde Vets Are Now Eligible For Disability Compensation From The Tribe

■ The benefit aids those covered by the Vets Administration, but will not double up with other Tribal benefits.

By Ron Karten

Here is the story of the little guy who saw a problem with government, which is not all that difficult, but he kept chipping away at it until the government saw the problem, too, which is a little less common, and he kept chipping away until the government did something about it, which is something to shout about any day.

In this case, the little guy was Tribal member Ron Rife, 53, a Veteran of the Gulf War, who emerged from the military alive but eligible for full disability.

"I seen at the Tribe there were only a few disabled Veterans receiving disability. The main thing I saw was that it was just people that was on Social Security Disability that was getting paid. I asked: 'Don't Veterans that are on Veterans' Disability qualify?' They said, 'No. We only recognize those on Social Security Disability.' That's when I began working on this."

He said he's been working on it for four or five years, and in the last two, "we were getting a hold

of it and making progress through the (Tribal Council) deal."

He gave Tribal member and



Photo by Toby McClary

Tribal member and Tribal Member Services Specialist Reina Nelson helps Grand Ronde disabled Veterans with a new program aimed for ages 18-54.

interim General Manager for the Tribe Chris Leno credit for making the effort happen.

"I did the legwork," said Leno, "gave council some options, and they decided whether to implement the program or not. And that's the way a lot of programs go."

Late last year, Leno took the proposal possibilities before council and with the idea of supporting disabled Vets at the same level that the Tribe supports disabled Elders. The council approved the program as part of the 2006 budget.

That means maximum payments of \$800/month for Vets receiving 100 percent disability payments from the Veterans Administration, and pro-rated payments for those with less than 100 percent disability.

The Tribal program began in July, and now helps 11 disabled Tribal Veterans. One receives 100 percent disability payments (\$800) and one at the other end of the scale receives 10 percent disability payments (\$80).

"It's not intended to supply all their needs," said Tribal member and Tribal Member Services Specialist Reina Nelson. "It's a

supplement."

It might cover, for example, post traumatic stress and other "war diseases" that Social Security Disability payments do not cover.

Those enrolled to date include Veterans from all the wars since Vietnam. They vary in age from 29-53. (Tribal Veterans from 18-54 are eligible. At 55, Tribal Elder benefits kick in, including pensions providing \$1,000/month.) And they live all across the country.

In the spring, Nelson is planning a membership forum to describe all of the member benefit programs, including this most recent addition. Along with the forum, said Nelson, she will be doing a direct mail outreach campaign to make sure that all disabled Tribal Veterans eligible for the program know about it and have an opportunity to be part of it.

The annual cost of the program to the Tribe is \$40,320 for this first year.

For more information, contact Reina Nelson in the Tribal Member Benefits office, 503 879-2223. ■

Museum Features Tribal Elder

■ Chuck Williams continues to show his outsized talents.

By Ron Karten

On Thursday, October 5, Tribal Elder Chuck Williams will share the center room at the Clark County Historical Museum with Native Artist Lillian Pitt (Warm Springs/Wasco/Yakama). The event is the last leg of a three-part, year-long series exploring — much from the Native point of view — the Northwest contribution to the Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery.

Williams' photographs from the 1990's feature Columbia River people from Grand Ronde and Nez Perce Tribes. And from Lillian Pitt, the Museum is show some of her masks and a salmon drying rack.

The exhibit, "Full Circle: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," runs from Thursday, October 5–December 30, and is free on First Thursday evenings each month.

The Museum chose Williams' "wonderful contemporary images," said Museum Director Susan Tissot, "because we want this exhibit to close with the idea that Native Americans are your neighbors, not just stereotypes."

"These are the last museum quality prints made directly from slides," said Williams. His gigantic library of film and slide photographs, and growing collection of digital photographs, all now go through the digital process for printing. Changing times are bringing new challenges to longstanding professional photographers, and Williams, for one, doesn't think that a digital print holds a candle to an "R" print from a Kodachrome slide.

In an artist statement that Williams still was preparing as *Smoke Signals* went to press, he intended to say that the Columbia River Indians were in the process of outliving photographic film.

This show marks a departure for Williams, who early in his career photographed only nature. Being a "purist," he said, he refused to include people. Which he now regrets. "I was so fanatic," he said, that he used to run around with a bunch of wild and now famous rock&rollers and

he never took a single shot of them.

What Williams has accomplished photographically, however, is an historical record of Northwest celebrations — Indian and otherwise — that is probably unparalleled.

"I used to shoot upwards of 1,000 rolls a year, mostly slides," he said. "Now, only a third or so are slides, and the rest are digital. I shoot 3,000 digital images a week-end and 10 rolls of slides."

His photography has been shown in museums and galleries across the Northwest.

Williams, 63, lives in The Dalles and has used his art in service to the environment for most of his life. He was the National Parks Expert for the environmental group, Friends of the Earth. Public Information Manager and Publications Editor for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. He has produced newsletters and publications for the Yakama Indian Nation and co-

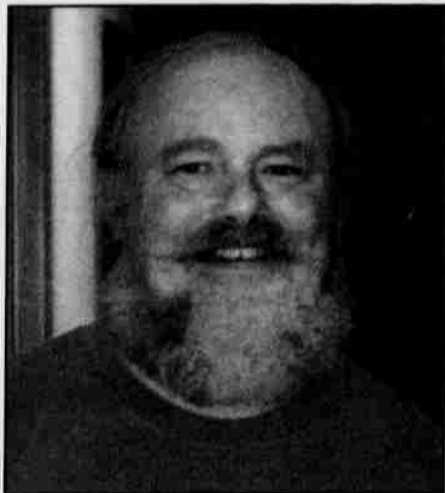


Photo by Toby McClary

Tribal Elder Chuck Williams

Clark County
Historical Museum
1511 Main St.
Vancouver, WA
www.cchmuseum.com

Tribal Elder Chuck
Williams' exhibit
opens October 5.

founded and managed for its first year Salmon Corps, a program on five Northwest Reservations in which Native American youth restore salmon and wildlife habitat while earning AmeriCorps college scholarships.

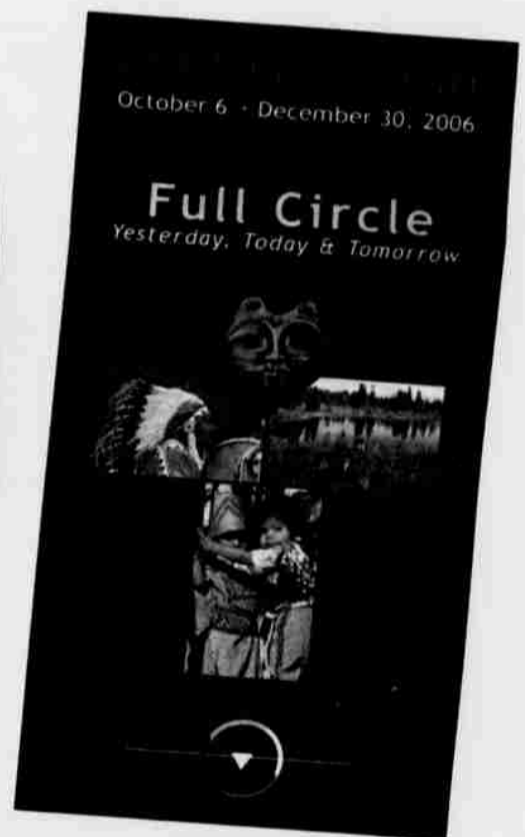
Williams also is the author of three books: *Bridge of the Gods, Mountains of Fire: A Return to the Columbia Gorge*, an illustrated history told from the perspectives of both his Indian and pioneer ancestors; *Mount St. Helens: A Changing Landscape*; and *Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument*, a mountaineers guidebook.

Williams' Indian pedigree goes right back to the heart of Northwest Indian history. His great great grandfather, Tumalth, a Cascade Indian, was hung by then Lieutenant Phil Sheridan, in a case that Williams' writing shows to be a miscarriage of justice.

Famous Indian chronicler Edward Curtis, whose 20 volumes of photography and 20 of prose detail American Indian life, told the Indian side of the story, said Williams.

On a school field trip to the Sonoma Mission, one of the early Spanish missions, many years ago, Williams refused to enter the Phil Sheridan room, telling his teacher that the soldier had killed his forebear. She told his mom, who was not Indian, "He has quite an imagination."

"I'm the white sheep of the family," said Williams.



The Clark County Historical Museum is located in Vancouver, Washington at 1511 Main St. Find it on the web at: www.cchmuseum.org. The exhibit opens with a blessing at 5 p.m. on October 5. Also on exhibit, "Our Woven History: Native American Basketry," both thru December 30.

Williams also will speak at the Museum on Thursday, December 7, at 7 p.m. on the subject: "We Were Here When the Pioneers Arrived: American Indians at the End of the Oregon Trail."

Also, on Thursday, November 2 at 7 p.m., Robert Miller, who is both Associate Professor at Lewis & Clark Law School and Chief Justice on the Grand Ronde Tribal Court of Appeals, will speak on the subject, "Native America Discovered and Conquered." He is a member of Circle of Advisors to the National Council of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial and specializes in Treaty Law. He has a new book out, not surprisingly, called, *Native America Discovered and Conquered*. ■