

Elvis Opens November's General Council Meeting

By Siobhan Taylor

Elvis was in the building for the November 5, 2006 General Council meeting of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Tribal Chairman Chris Mercier donned an Elvis-like wig, sunglasses and sideburns to get the attention of the membership as he prepared to open the meeting. Council members Reyn Leno and Jack Giffen, Jr. were out for hunting trip. The opening invocation was given by Wesley "Buddy" West. The minutes were approved as corrected and the new business part of the agenda got underway.

Finance Officer Larry Kovach presented the 2007 Preliminary Budget to the membership. Kovach acknowledged the efforts of his staff Rick Andersen, Nancy Renfro as well as the technical assistance of Willie Mercier from Information Systems, for making the presentation possible. He also announced that the budget would be mailed the next day, to all Tribal members in *Tilixam Wawa* thanks to the efforts of Justin Phillips of the *Smoke Signals* Staff and Rick Anderson of Budget/Treasury. The preliminary budget was also scheduled to be on the Tribal Website. Since the budget is proprietary, exact numbers are not reported in *Smoke Signals*.

Kovach walked the membership through a Power Point presentation that included pie charts and graphs outlining endowments, two of which are fully funded, and investment earnings. The result was a balanced budget with a small excess.

One of the areas of greatest concern to Tribal members was the Tribal Member Health Plan. Other questions surrounded timber revenue, (90% of which goes directly to the members) and housing.

The last half of Kovach's presentation focused on Departmental Analysis. Tribal member Monty Parazoo asked if the Tribe was adding a program. Kovach responded that there was a grant funded position and an additional employee for the Eugene office. Parazoo said he wanted to congratulate key staff for holding the line.

Tribal Council Vice Chair Angie Blackwell agreed with Parazoo and congratulated management and the Executive Team. "They followed Tribal Council's directive to hold the line and present a balanced budget," Blackwell said.

Other questions focused on the Tribe's investment portfolio, (Kovach explained its diversification is similar to a 401K with 14 money managers) socially responsible investing (Cheryle Kennedy explained that the topic had been discussed at a recent investment committee meeting) and a Tribally owned bank (Kovach pointed out a Tribally owned bank would have to be completely independent from the Tribe).

The Tribe's health coverage received the most comment during the meeting. The Tribal Council has decided to consider a monthly premium to Tribal members of \$25 per month and increase in the monthly premium to non-Tribal Elder spouses (from the current \$50 to \$75 per month). Blackwell asked Tribal members who have employee health insurance to use it and move off the Tribe's program for primary care, using the Tribe as secondary insurance. Tribal members will have the option of paying the premium by deduction from per capita.

comments and explained that the Tribe now has a full-time judge and Tribal Council is working with her on expanding court services. Blackwell also added that the Tribe needs a commerce code and is in the process of hiring a community development director. She again addressed the healthcare issue telling membership that healthcare is in crisis across the country and we need to determine how to maintain services with rapidly escalating claims expense.

Tribal member Bernadine Shriver encouraged Tribal members to

inquiries about enrollment and DNA testing. Rob Greene, Tribal Attorney, told members DNA testing is included in the Enrollment Ordinance. When the ordinance was amended it went out for public comment to the membership.

Mercier was asked about his trip to Korea. Mercier told membership that the Korea relationship is part of building coalitions with Yamhill and Polk county governments. CTGR sent a representative with the delegation 10 years before when Mark Mercier made the trip. And, last year, our Tribe hosted the Korean delegation. The expense to the Tribe was airfare. Mercier paid his own mileage and paid for the gifts he distributed. His other costs were absorbed by the delegation.

The issue of the casino board and Tribal Council representation on it was raised again. Blackwell agreed that the board is getting politicized and announced that she is planning to resign her seat. She stated that serving on Tribal Council is a full-time job. She feels there is a need to focus her efforts on Tribal Council. There are two vacancies on the casino board and the Tribe will be posting a notice about them to all the membership.

Tribal member Peri McDaniel asked about the amount of casino profits that can be returned to Tribal members under NIGA. She asked why we didn't have a higher allocation. Kennedy answered that the Tribe had submitted a 50% proposal but it was rejected. Greene added that there are other factors they consider and that he just returned from a consultation on the matter with NIGC. Jack Giffen and Blackwell attended the same meeting. He also cautioned the Tribe may be required to go back and set the amounts every five years. Membership will be kept informed as negotiations continue.

Other items included the status of hiring the Human Resources Director. Pete Wakeland, Acting Director of Operations reported a recruitment was being engaged.

The final question before the meeting was adjourned, addressed planning for the 25th anniversary of the Tribe's Restoration. A suggestion was made that the individuals responsible for restoration be recognized through a commemorative sculpture. Dakota Whitecloud responded that she and Jackie Provost are working on this year's celebration and the 25th celebration will be more expanded. A suggestion was made that the Culture committee be involved in the planning.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m. Elvis had left the building.

The next General Council meeting will be held on Sunday, December 3, 2006. ■



Tribal Chairman Chris Mercier donned an Elvis-like wig, sunglasses and sideburns to get the attention of the membership as he prepared to open the meeting. The meeting focused on the 2007 Preliminary Budget.

The healthcare discussion continued after the lunch break.

Debby Larsen, Risk Manager, stated she was unaware of the issues until the General Council meeting, but that the Health Committee will meet to discuss them. Kovach pointed out that the discussion was premature as the team assigned to discuss it had not completed their work.

Tribal member Betty Bly voiced her opposition to the premium and stated that healthcare had always been a mission of the Tribe, and as such, she disagreed with the premiums. Kovach again reminded membership that there are four proposals on Healthcare and the premium structure is one. The proposed work has not been completed and will not be for several months.

Tribal member Monty Parazoo asked why no letters had been sent out about the Health care issue. Larsen responded that a letter went out in August asking if Tribal members had other insurance available. That letter was followed up with emails and phone calls. That survey got a 70% rate of response.

Other questions from Tribal members involved expanding Tribal services and expanding role of the Tribal court. Blackwell thanked members for their

find less expensive ways to fill their prescriptions, choosing lower cost generic drugs if possible and utilizing the Tribe's pharmacy. "Each of us can do something to help our Tribe," Shriver said. "The Tribal plan has increased 33% from this year compared to last year. Each one of us has to help in our own way."

The budget presentation wrapped up and door prizes were awarded. Then, the meeting moved onto Other Business. Questions included the status of the Tribal member employment hearing and any future decisions. Mercier answered that while there are no further public meetings scheduled, it will be discussed by Tribal Council. Concern was expressed about the casino board and if it was becoming politicized. Kennedy responded that she didn't feel it was politicized. There is one board meeting per month. Other questions about the casino centered on the expansion and how it will be financed. Kovach told members the casino will be requesting a resolution to access the Tribe's line of credit. The improvements will include the buffet area, a conference and entertainment center, water infrastructure improvements.

Other Tribal members made

Photo by Siobhan Taylor