



SMOKE SIGNALS

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A Publication of the Grand Ronde Tribe

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UMPQUA

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ROGUE RIVER

KALAPUYA

CHASTA

Fire Chief Triggers False Alarm

By Siobhan Taylor

A recent article in *The Oregonian* Newspaper falsely claimed that fire safety at Spirit Mountain Casino is an issue. The article quoted claims from the West Valley Fire District Chief Eddings that the lack of a hook and ladder truck for his department meant that lives at the casino were in imminent danger. The claims couldn't be further from the truth according to casino management, the Executive Director of the Gaming Commission and outside fire safety experts.

When the issue of fire safety at the casino was first raised in 2004, by the local fire chief, the Commission met with the Oregon State Police, Department of Justice and both the State Fire Marshall and the West Valley Fire Chief. They mutually agreed that an independent fire risk analysis would address the concerns and selected HYT Corporation, an independent fire engineering firm skilled in evaluating fire and life safety systems and compliance with National standards. HYT's findings unequivocally state, that the Spirit Mountain Casino and lodge represent a model facility in regard to the features and programs in place for fire and life safety to protect employees and patrons from injury or death.

After their report was issued, the local fire chief began to list complaints about HYT and their results with the state. HYT's response to that said, "It is unfortunate that the West Valley Fire District appears to have reviewed the analysis outside of the context and scope in which it was developed. It also appears the fire

activated and the building is evacuated. Their job would be to perform mop-up, and that doesn't require a hook and ladder truck."

Prior to *The Oregonian* article, Tribal General Manager Chris Leno addressed Chief Eddings concerns in a letter. In the letter Leno reassured the chief about the Casino's fire



Photo by Toby McClary

district may be attempting to use the analysis as a basis for the pursuit of other goals or agendas."

That outside goal or agenda became obvious in *The Oregonian* article. West Valley wants a hook and ladder truck. But Lynn Hillman, Executive Director of the Gaming Commission for Spirit Mountain Casino, points out that a hook and ladder truck would be of no value to the casino fire effort. "By the time West Valley arrives the fire suppression system has

system. "This system is so effective that if a fire emergency were to occur the casino and lodge, patrons and employees would be efficiently evacuated and the fire likely suppressed before the arrival of fire suppression services."

The Oregonian article and Chief Eddings complaints have also come under fire by Tribal Council and Tribal members. Tribal Chairman Chris Mercier points out that the Tribe has chosen to work with the

community in a variety of ways when it comes to public safety. The Tribe's Spirit Mountain Community Fund, which donates 6% of the profits from the casino to non-profit organizations in an 11-county area, has given over \$350,000 to West Valley for equipment needs. The Tribe also supports the Polk County Sheriff's Office through the community fund. The sheriff sub-station is housed, without charge, on Tribal land and the fund supports six full-time deputies. To date the community fund has given over \$36 million to local non-profits.

"Our Tribe is exemplary when it comes to government-to-government relations," said Tribal lobbyist and Grand Ronde Tribal member Justin Martin. "We have an award winning government relations program, we have agreements with Polk County Sheriff's office and other governmental agencies. The Tribe works with ODOT, the DEQ and more."

Hillman agrees and says if there was an issue about fire safety it would have been brought up during compact negotiations and the governor would never have approved the new gaming compact. "The bottom line is that fire and life safety at our casino is NOT an issue. It's just unfortunate that the local fire chief is trying to make it one." ■

Snowfall Causes Office Closures



Photo by Toby McClary

Tribal Elder Bob Mercier works on clearing the roads around the Tribal Campus in Grand Ronde on Friday, January 12. Offices were impacted by the winter weather which forced the closure of Tribal Offices on Thursday, January 11 and Tuesday, January 16. As a result, the production of the January 15, 2007 issue of *Smoke Signals* has been delayed.

Grand Ronde Tribal Council Begins Feasibility Study

By Siobhan Taylor

The Grand Ronde Tribal Council is continuing its ongoing conversation about ways to improve fire and emergency response time for Tribal lands and the surrounding community. On Thursday, January 4 the Tribal Council instructed Tribal Director of Economic Development, and Tribal member, Pete Wakeland, to draw up the parameters

to an emergency call here. Under good conditions that drive time is 18 minutes, that's too long when lives are at stake," said Tribal General Manager, Chris Leno.

Leno and Spirit Mountain Casino Gaming Commission Director, Lynn Hillman has been involved in discussing the issue of fire response time for well over a year. Hillman's outreach has included conversations

The study will examine a number of options including building and staffing a Fire Department on Tribal lands and enhancing and staffing the current West Valley Fire District's Grand Ronde sub-station.

of a feasibility study. The Tribe is evaluating and seeking discussions with West Valley Fire District about the current situation and ways to improve it. The study will examine a number of options including building and staffing a Fire Department on Tribal lands and enhancing and staffing the current West Valley Fire District's Grand Ronde sub-station.

"There's been an on-going concern in Grand Ronde about the length of time it takes West Valley to respond

with the West Valley Fire District Chief about the possibility of a full-time substation in Grand Ronde. Now, that discussion will also look at the possibility of building a brand new substation on Tribal lands.

"Right now we're preparing a written framework for the study," said Wakeland. He expects the framework to be ready and presented to Tribal Council within the next three weeks. After that review the council will determine what avenue they want to pursue. ■



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