

Reflections On Tribal Restoration, Part IV

(Note: If you missed Parts I, II, and III, see the December 1, 2006, January 1, 2007, and February 1, 2007 *Smoke Signals* issues).

By Angie Sears, Tribal Mentee

On November 22, 1983, the fight for restoration finally came to an end, but that was not the end of the struggle and the fight for justice for the Grand Ronde Tribe. There would be no rest for Tribal Council, as they were just beginning to embark on a whole new set of challenges in hopes to better the lives of the Grand Ronde people.

At the time of restoration, there still wasn't a lot of money and the Council continued to work out of the confined space of the cemetery office.

The first issue at hand for the Council was to begin drafting a constitution for the Tribe that would need to be approved and presented to the general membership and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This whole process took a little more than a year.

In the mean time, the Tribe moved to the old Rail Road Depot building and hired three full-time employees, a general manager, a planner, and a financial person, who would begin helping Council build the foundation for the Grand Ronde Community.

These first Tribal employees would begin the process of re-enrolling Tribal members who were on the rolls prior to termination. In 1983, there were a total of 862 members who were officially enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. In 1984, the rolls were opened up to new members and the membership grew to 1,156.

By the end of 1984, three more employees had been hired to help in providing the Tribal membership with much needed services. Among those hired was Cheryl Kennedy, Rogue River and Umpqua Tribal member. Kennedy was hired as the Health and Social Services Director, and was responsible for conducting a needs assessment for the Tribal membership to determine what programs the Tribe needed to focus on first.

"I conducted a social economics survey to get a better understanding of our education levels, our financial levels, and to gather health data for Tribal members. The needs assessment was a huge project because we decided to do it one-on-one with every Tribal member. We got a list from the restoration roll and started training interviewers. We tried to contact everyone on the termination rolls, and used the *Smoke Signals* to let people know we needed to contact them and get their information. The members who we knew were deceased were taken off the rolls, but there were some that we didn't know about," said Kennedy. "But that's kind of what set all of our programs in motion."

The surveys determined that the Tribe had a special need to provide health care services for its membership in Grand Ronde, rather than requiring members to

be seen at Chemawa clinic, which is the federally provided Indian Health Service (IHS) for Native Americans in the area.

The Tribe began to move forward with plans of opening a medical clinic, and provided the first services in 1985 with a registered nurse to see patients. Shortly after, they were able to bring in a family nurse practitioner, and slowly began building the services from there.

While the Tribal employees were working on this process, Council was working towards regaining the Tribal lands that were taken from the Tribe so many years ago. Council worked closely with Elizabeth Furse, who also played a significant role in helping the Tribe win the fight for restoration.

Furse, who is not Native American, has dedicated her life to fighting against unjust issues, and has spent 38 years working with some of the Native American Tribes of the Northwest in an attempt to

Council and staff continued to work on the development of programs to benefit the Tribal membership.

In 1991, the Tribe built a community center to serve as a social gathering place. The building was utilized as a place to hold general council meetings and as a meal site for Tribal Elders.

By now, the Tribe was seeing substantial growth in its membership and in its success of creating programs to benefit its Tribal members. In 1991, the membership had grown to more than 2,800 members.

The Council and staff had successfully created programs to support Tribal members in areas such as education, health care, social services, and emergency housing assistance. But that was not the biggest benefit Tribal members were seeing. Many Tribal members were beginning to see a sense of pride that had been renewed. There was vindication, and there

ronmental concerns about logging as a whole. A lot of people were seeing their livelihoods being jeopardized as a result of the spotted owl controversy and the fish habitat destruction. As a result, some of the local mills were being forced to shut down and many jobs were lost," said Mercier. "It was estimated that there would be 1,200 full-time positions established if we built the casino. So on an economic standpoint people thought it would be a good thing for the area."

Once Council made the decision to go ahead with gaming, they began negotiations with Congress. Siletz was attempting to establish gaming in Salem at the time, so for Congress, there was some concern about gaming saturation across the nation.

"It took a lot of leg work and many trips to D.C. to meet with Congress ... and then Congress developed the National Indian Gaming Commission, so we had to do a lot of leg work through them as well," Mercier said.

Once the approval was given for the Tribe to go ahead with its venture, they moved the office for the forestry department and broke ground for the casino.

On October 17, 1995, the Tribe held its Grand Opening for Spirit Mountain Casino. The casino was an instant success and soon became one of Oregon's leading attraction with a consistent and large following.

The success of the casino has enabled the Tribe to enhance its current Tribal programs and further develop the Grand Ronde community.

In 1997, the Tribe opened its doors to the new Health and Wellness Center, which houses a health clinic that offers medical services, ex-ray, urgent care, contract health, optometry services, dental services, and pharmacy services.

In 1997, the Tribe developed the Spirit Mountain Community Fund as a means to carry out the tradition of giving back to the communities. The Tribe allocates six percent of the casino's revenues to the Community Fund, which distributes the funds to non-profit organizations residing within an eleven county area. From the time the Fund was developed, the Tribe has given more than \$40 million to charitable organizations.

In 1998, the Tribe opened the Governance Center, which houses Tribal Council, Executive Office, Legal, Tribal Court, Public Affairs/Publications, Spirit Mountain Community Fund, Member Services, Human Resources, Finance/Accounting, and Grants and Development.

By this time, the number of Tribal employees had grown to 250 employees, and that didn't include the more than 1,000 employees working at the casino.

The casino created many employment opportunities for Tribal members and non-Indian members of the community, and paved the way



Tribal member April Campbell

Photo by Toby McClary

ensure that justice is met for these Tribes.

After nearly four years of lobbying and going before Congress, the Tribe finally succeeded with what is probably its second greatest achievement. On September 9, 1988 President Ronald Regan signed the Grand Ronde Reservation Act, and 9,811 acres of original reservation land was returned to the Tribe.

"The most impressive thing about restoration for me is that a group of Tribal members had the faith to keep going at it. It was not an easy thing to do. It took a long, long time, and it took a great deal of personal sacrifice. That is the most impressive thing about restoration for any of the Tribes I worked with," Furse said. "It took a group of people who were dedicated and never lost faith that they would indeed succeed."

"The establishment of reservation timber lands brought in new revenues and allowed the Tribe to begin purchasing other lands," said Mark Mercier, Rogue River and Umpqua Tribal member, and former Tribal Council member. "The money that the Tribe received from the Federal Government at restoration could only be used for certain things, such as health care, education, and housing... so this was a good thing."

As the Tribe began to grow, the

was recognition for who they were as Native people.

"I was in the navy for four years and I went to Vietnam for a year. I was in support activity, and was not in the fighting; I thank God for that. A lot of people lost their lives over there. One of my best friends lost his life the same day I found out I was going over there. There were several Tribal members that were in Vietnam. The Native Americans volunteered for hazardous duty more than any other race in the Vietnam War. We went back in 1992 as a 10-year anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial there. Four of us got to go back to D.C. from the Tribe, and we actually got to march down Philadelphia Ave. carrying the Grand Ronde Tribal flag," said Mike Larsen, Umpqua and Chinook Tribal member. "It was quite an honor. They asked all the Native Americans to lead the parade. So we were right out there with those little Yakama Indian ladies."

In the early 1990's, Council began talking about the idea of getting involved in gaming. There was some apprehension in the decision to embark on a venture as big as opening a casino, but current economic situations in the area aided in Council's decision to go ahead with the plan.

"In the 1980's there were envi-

See RESTORATION
on page 5