

The Driveway Cometh

■ Tribe gives ABC Daycare/Preschool in Sheridan \$5,000 for a new driveway.

By Ron Karten

"We've been patching it over for three years," said Ron Wearer, Pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Sheridan. The church runs the Adventist Beginning Courtesy (ABC) Daycare/Preschool program next door, and the asphalt between the two facilities is crumbling.

Early on Wednesday, March 21, Grand Ronde Tribal Council Chair Chris Mercier, and Council members Wesley "Buddy" West, Wink Soderberg, Val Sheker, and Reyn Leno presented a \$5,000 check for resurfacing the driveway.

Before the ceremony could even begin, the beautiful little voice of Tribal member Darian Leno, 3, daughter of Tribal members Shonn and Egypt Leno, and granddaughter of Reyn Leno, cried out, "Grandpa" and ran into his arms, where she stayed for the duration.

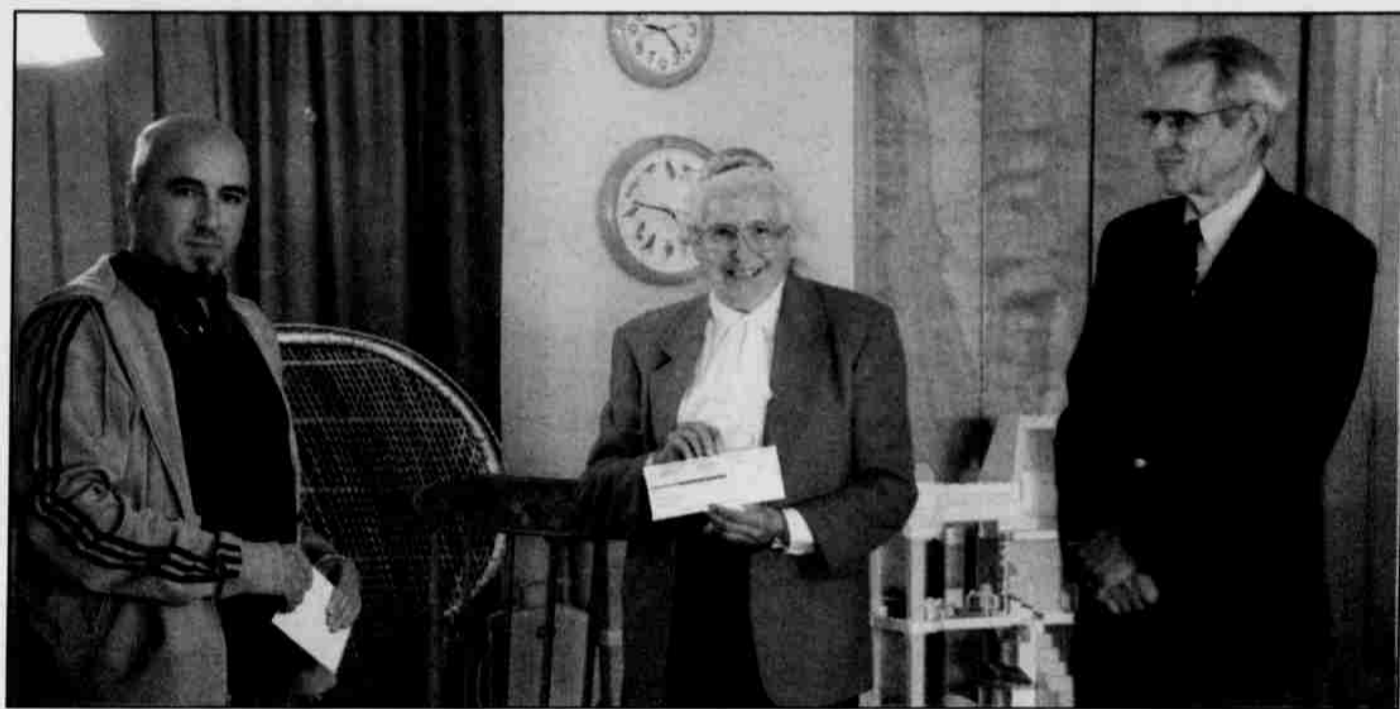
Program Director Jeri Nelson, Teacher Jeri, as she is known to the children, and the Pastor accepted the check. Teacher Jeri, who is 75 and not about to retire, said that it is the work of many that make the day care/preschool work.

Teacher Jeri has been Program Director for the day care/preschool program for 15 years. She invites parents to drop in and stay with the children if they want, and she insists on proper behavior.

Together, the class goes through the symbolism of the American flag: the 13 red and white stripes symbolize the original 13 colonies, the red represents the blood shed in the founding of the country, and the white represents purity.

"Don't tell me that children can't learn," she said.

Teacher Jeri, an elementary edu-



Tribal Chair Chris Mercier (l) presented Program Director Jeri Nelson "Teacher Jeri" and Pastor Ron Wearer with a \$5,000 check for resurfacing the driveway at the ABC Daycare in Sheridan. The event took place at the daycare with the children, staff and members of Tribal Council all present.

cation specialist, knows a lot from all her years working with children, but she did not realize until recently how filled with Indian blessings her program was. She made a count in the days leading up to this presentation, and found that 12 of the 70-90 children in the program are enrolled Grand Ronde Tribal members, and another six are members of other Tribes. Mostly Cherokee, she said.

"Stand up tall, like the capital I," she told the children. "Stand tall and proud like an Indian."

Then, she invited the children to come to the front of the room to speak, but only if they wanted to. The kids were asked to come up front, take the microphone, intro-

duce themselves, and tell what they are most grateful for.

Devon Hallock, 4, was thankful for Chuck E. Cheese.

Tribal Chair Chris Mercier was thankful for the sunny day.

Wesley "Buddy" West and Val Sheker were thankful to meet all the children.

Reyn Leno was thankful for that the children have a good school with good teachers.

"We pride ourselves that we like to give back," said Mercier, with check in hand. "And we want to be a positive influence in the lives of children."

"We're here for the family," said Teacher Jeri. "Safety is our number one concern and courtesy is number two."

After the ceremony, Tribal Council members toured the playground out back. It was filled with kid-sized houses and swings, all kinds of tricycles, and a waterfall, all of which were donated and built by local businesses and individuals.

Mercier said how appropriate it was that the jungle gym had been painted green and yellow (the colors of the University of Oregon Ducks), and Leno said how it might have been more appropriately painted orange and black (the colors of the Oregon State University Beavers).

Teacher Jeri noted that they had been thinking of daffodils when they came up with the green and yellow colors. ■



Members of Tribal Council pose with the children and ABC Daycare/Preschool staff in Sheridan on Wednesday, March 21.

Photos by Toby McClary