

Casino sponsors patriotic gala to bring aircraft carrier to Portland

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Among some 50,000 Navy personnel who have served on the USS Ranger over the last 30 years are a core group hoping to save the doomed aircraft carrier from a resting place in the murky deep.

A berth at the Port of Portland, they hope, will do the trick.

A "dinner, silent auction-benefit, patriotic event" to raise public awareness about the effort was sponsored by the Tribe's Spirit Mountain Casino and held at the 82nd Brigade Armory in Lake Oswego on Feb. 28.

"We've been wanting to bring the USS Ranger here as a living museum or tactical center for emergency response for seven years," said Charles Sams (Umatilla), an Intelligence specialist who served on the Ranger in the first Gulf War, and is also vice president of marketing for the board of directors of the USS Ranger Museum Foundation.

The alternative, said Capt. Tim Myers, executive director of the foundation, is that "it will be taken out in the Pacific and sunk. Nobody wants aircraft carriers anymore."

The Ranger, a CV-61 carrier — so large that it required the services of 6,000 men and women when it was a working ship; so interesting that a tour of the ship could be a three-and-a-half hour adventure — now sits in a slip in Bremerton, Wash., along with the Independence and the Constellation, two other retired aircraft carriers awaiting their Davy Jones fate, Meyers said.

In support of this effort, along with the Tribe, were highly decorated soldiers and professional athletes, including members of the Portland Trail Blazers.

Spirit Mountain Casino, with \$3,500 and other in-kind contributions, was sole financial sponsor of the evening's event, the latest step in a public awareness campaign that has also included boat and air shows and Portland Winter Hawks hockey games.

The effort is more than sentimental.

"She is the golden goose or should I say the cash cow," said Garrie Ghiglier (Apache), event organizer and board member of the Ranger Museum Foundation. "She will create a vast

economic impact for Oregon. Wouldn't it be great to have small boats go to OMSI from the ship? It will be the largest floating museum in the world. It will be a major tourist attraction in Oregon in concert with museums, Spirit Mountain, Timberline Lodge ..."

The effort to turn the ship into a museum started when the USS Ranger was decommissioned in the mid-1990s, but earlier ambitions of parking the carrier in Seattle and Tacoma fell short, said Ghiglier.

The Rangers currently are in discussions with the city of Portland, the state and the Port of Portland to find a home for the carrier at Terminal One or Two, Sams said.

"As soon as we get the parking space and the paperwork is ready to go," Ghiglier said, benefactors have promised to pay for the move to Portland.

"She was humanitarian," Ghiglier said of the Ranger, "over in Desert Storm, in Somalia, during Vietnam, she helped the boat people. She has a very long, honorable history."

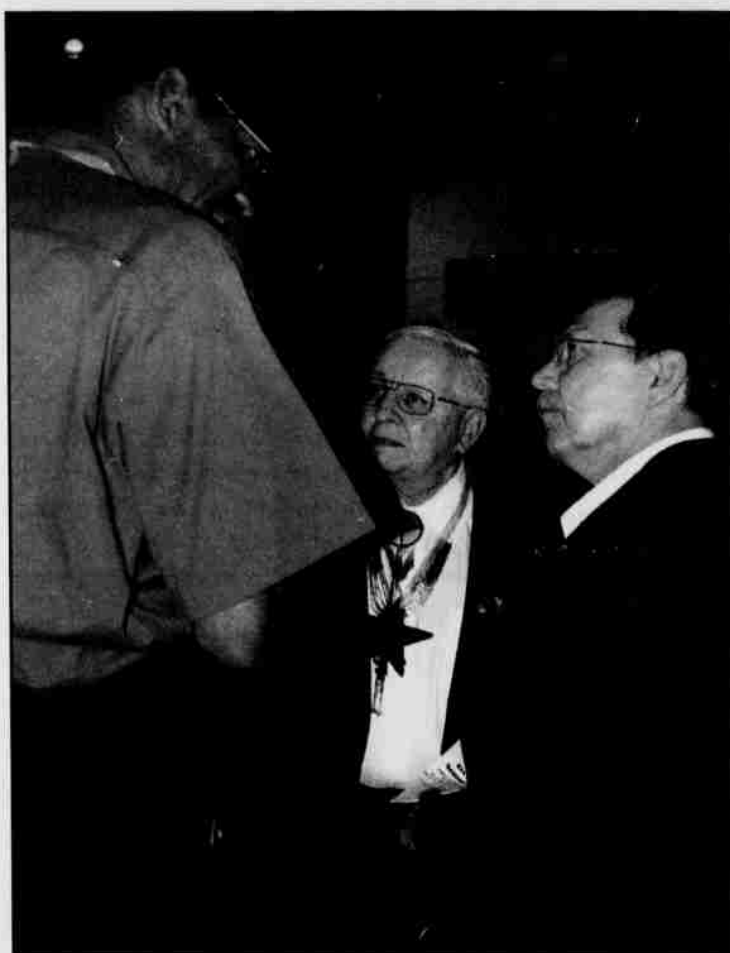
"And, she's been kept in good shape to this day, in case it is ever needed to be redeployed."

Although the evening did not raise significant money for the effort, the evening was more than breakeven, and Ghiglier said that public awareness is most important.

On hand from the Tribe were Tribal Council members June Sell-Sherer and Wink Soderberg, along with Council Secretary Jack Giffen Jr. Also representing the Tribe was Kathy Bland, the casino's Sponsorship co-coordinator and point person for the casino on the effort. And spouses.

The Grand Ronde Honor Guard started and ended the evening, along with Grand Ronde's Senior Veterans' Queen Miranda Provost and Young Warrior Peter Nelson.

The cavalcade of veteran stars on hand in support of the effort included William H. Holloman III, a World War II Tuskegee Airman



Photos by Ron Karten

Former Portland Trail Blazer Michael Harper, left, talks with Grand Ronde Tribal Council members Wink Soderberg, center, and Jack Giffen Jr. during the Feb. 28 USS Ranger Museum Foundation fundraiser held in Lake Oswego.

and recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal; Col. Joe Jackson, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient; and Capt. Kenneth Reusser, the most decorated living Marine in Oregon with more than 200 combat missions in three wars.

Oregon Trail Blazer alumni included Dale Schluter, Michael Harper and Bob Gross. Major League pitcher Tom Gorman of the New York Mets and San Diego Padres also participated. Portland's own Neil Lomax, the legendary quarterback of the St. Louis Cardinals and an eight-year National Football League veteran, and Jon Arnett, a player for the Los Angeles Rams and Chicago Bears, also were there. So was Bill Shonely, the well-known Northwest broadcaster, who acted as master of ceremonies.

Entertainment included the 2 Sisters Trio, who performed such World War II classics as "Under the Apple Tree," "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" and "You're a Grand Old Flag."

The Vancouver Pipe Band gave bagpipe renditions of the best old patriotic standards.

"This would not be possible without the help of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde," said Ray Kutch, president of the Rangers.

The museum board next meets on April 18, and they have chosen to convene at Spirit Mountain Lodge, said Ghiglier.

"Spirit Mountain folks stepped up to the plate for us," she said, "and Ranger folks will remember that, I'll tell you." ■



Audience members stand for the Grand Ronde Honor Guard during the Feb. 28 fundraiser for the USS Ranger Museum Foundation held in Lake Oswego. Col. Joe Jackson, seated in wheelchair, is a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient. Spirit Mountain Casino was the sole financial sponsor of the event.