

New rules will keep costs down

General Council
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30.3 percent of the Health Plan membership and 41.4 percent of the claims paid in 2007.

Larsen said that 89 percent of the 4,649 members consumed 100 percent of the benefits, meaning 525 members used no benefits in 2007.

And 1,155 members — 28 percent — consumed 90 percent of the benefits paid (\$18.6 million). The other 72 percent of Health Plan members used the other 10 percent of the benefits paid.

"These 1,155 members average \$16,133 per member per year," Larsen said. "If this were true for all members, the plan year cost would be \$75 million."

To combat increasing costs, Larsen said that effective July 1 new rules will be instituted for Health Plan members visiting emergency rooms, notoriously known as the most expensive place to receive medical care.

Larsen said emergency room use in 2007 was double what it should have been for a group the Tribe's size. Of the 1,254 emergency room visits in 2007, almost 50 percent were later determined to be non-emergencies.

The Tribe paid \$1.7 million for emergency room visits in 2007 and \$716,000 went for non-emergencies.

In response to a question, Larsen said that some Tribal Health Plan members do not have a primary care physician and are not accustomed to using less expensive urgent care facilities.

"Our usage (of emergency rooms) is very high," Larsen said, "and it's not being used for emergency reasons."

Under the new rules, Tribal Health Plan members will be encouraged to use primary care physicians or urgent care facilities instead of emergency rooms. If a Health Plan member uses an emergency room and the situation is determined to be a non-emergency, they will have to pay 50 percent of the charges.

Tribal Elder Monty Parazoo suggest-



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Tribal Member Services Manager Debby Larsen discusses the Tribal Member Health Plan during the April 6 General Council meeting held at the Valley River Inn in Eugene.

ed a proactive approach in which Tribal Health Plan members who use emergency rooms as their primary health care provider receive counseling.

"We need to make them aware of what this is costing the Tribe," Parazoo said. "We need to get Tribal members to buy into this. This is our medical plan and we need to take care of it."

Tribal member Deborah Bernando also suggested an advocate position be created to reach out to Tribal members who need help enlisting primary care physicians or understanding urgent care facilities.

In another cost-saving move, starting July 1 the benefit for using out-of-network providers will decrease from 80 percent to 70 percent in an effort to encourage use of in-network providers who offer plan discounts. However, Health Plan members who do not have

an in-network provider within 25 miles of their home can see who they prefer at the 90 percent in-network rate.

Tribal Elder John Darcy said that he is "basically pleased" with the Tribal Health Plan, but encouraged increased vision benefits. In 2007, the plan spent \$128,537 on vision, or \$28 per member.

Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy said the Tribe will look at increasing medical benefits as it continues educating Health Plan members in ways to save money.

"We need to get all members to identify primary care givers who are in-network," Kennedy said about the optimum way to control Health Plan costs.

Other Tribal members mentioned problems with Blue Cross Blue Shield not acting as the primary

provider when an individual also has employer coverage.

Larsen said the Tribe's health care administrator is working on those problems on a case-by-case basis at the request of Blue Cross Blue Shield, but the Tribal Health Plan is always secondary in those situations.

"Blue Cross Blue Shield has an obligation," Larsen said, "to be primary when they are."

In other action during the General Council meeting, Tribal Council announced the next General Council meeting will be held 11 a.m. Sunday, May 4, at the Tribal gymnasium in Grand Ronde.

Tribal members Donna Casey, Jim Holmes and Marlena Lancour won the \$50 door prizes and Tribal Elder Roger Stroebel took home the \$100 door prize. ■

Dinner guests



Photo by Siobhan Taylor

From left, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg and his wife, Kathy, and Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. attended the Oregon Restaurant Association's annual auction dinner event held at the Portland Art Museum on March 18. Spirit Mountain Casino was a Silver Sponsor of the event. The Oregon Restaurant Association is a member of the Coalition for Oregon's Future, partnering with the Tribe, Friends of the Columbia Gorge and other groups to oppose off-reservation gaming, in particular the Warm Spring proposal to build at Cascade Locks. The event raised more than \$160,000 to support efforts of the association's Political Action Committee. Other Tribal Council members who attended were Kathleen Tom and her husband, Louis King; other Executive Team members who attended were Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor and Tribal member and lobbyist Justin Martin.

Grand Ronde Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

The Grand Ronde Tribe is operating its own Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to assist income eligible Grand Ronde Tribal members with energy payments (utility bills, firewood, etc.), energy emergencies and weatherization (e.g. furnace repairs).

Households with an adult Grand Ronde Tribal member are eligible to apply within Polk, Yamhill, Marion, Washington, Multnomah, Tillamook and Clackamas counties. CTGR members in these counties need to contact Grand Ronde to receive assistance instead of from the community action agency in their area. Grand Ronde's program enables more CTGR members to be served than would otherwise have been possible.

If you are interested in obtaining services, contact Social Services at 1-800-242-8196 for energy assistance and the Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority at 503-879-2405 for weatherization. The Tribe's LIHEAP program also serves all income eligible Indians on Grand Ronde Reservation or trust land.

