

Important seasonal Tribal events canceled

SNOW continued
from front page

residents reported measuring snow depths of almost 3 feet in their yards.

"It was bad," said Tribal Council Vice Chairman and longtime Grand Ronde resident Reyn Leno. "You couldn't pull in on the main road off the highway. ... It was the most snow I've seen since I was a kid."

"I'm pretty tall and the snow came up above my knees," said Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker, who lives in Tribal Housing.

"It was the worst snow event I've experienced," said Tribal member and Director of Operations John Mercier. "Back in 1968 or '69, we had one when I was a kid. The power outage was the worst issue we had to deal with."

Leno said he became really concerned after about 6 inches of snow fell and it continued snowing with the addition of freezing rain.

He said he started receiving phone calls from Tribal Elders, who were concerned about running out of their medications and not being able to refill them.

Leno said he called Tribal General Manager Chris Leno about clearing the roads to allow access by an ambulance in case of a medical emergency.

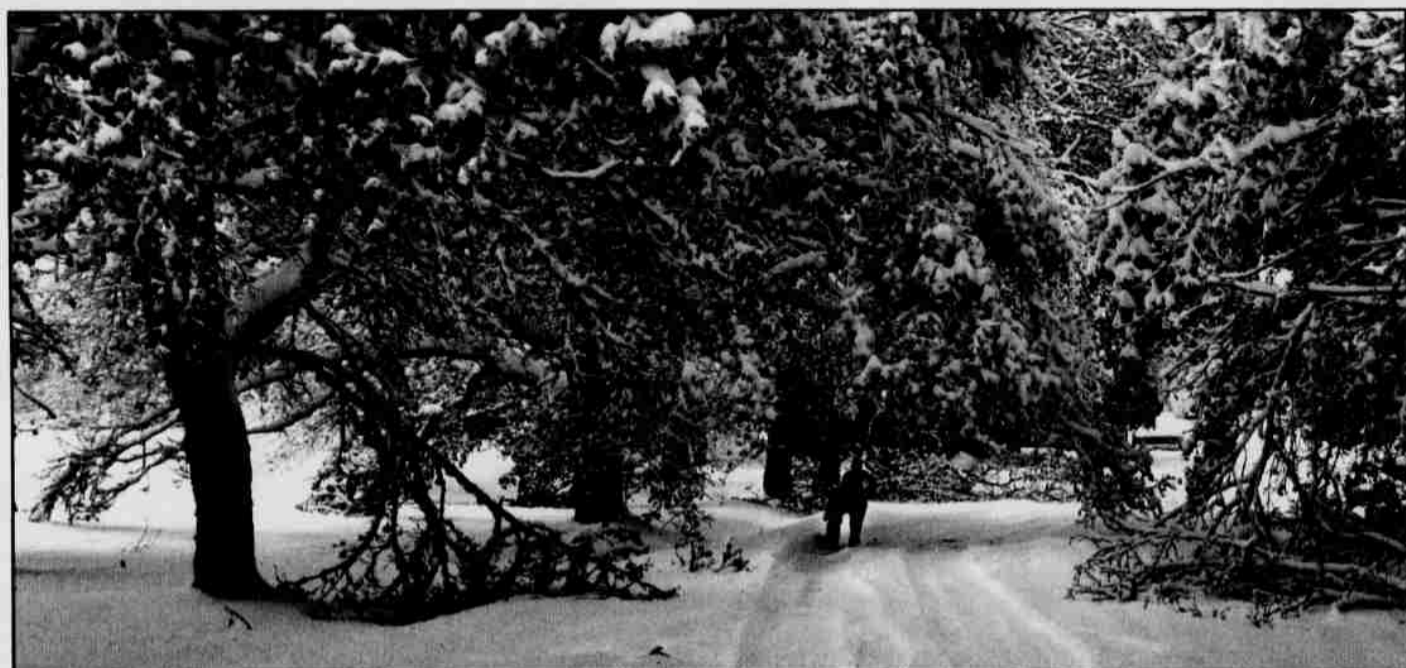
Tribal member and Public Works Manager Lewis Younger said Facilities Maintenance Supervisor Doug Colton and maintenance technicians Tim Murphy and Jeff Larsen were instrumental in providing immediate services for the benefit of the Tribe.

"(Colton's) presence and direction were instrumental in providing passable roadways for Grand Meadows and the main campus," Younger said.

Round Valley equipment helped clear the roads and bladed snow off the Tribal campus parking lots, said Round Valley foreman Tom Brown.

"It was about 20 inches," Brown said. "It was pretty deep."

Sheker said she and her fiancé,



People walk down South Street in Grand Ronde on Tuesday, Dec. 23. The snow-covered street is lined with broken tree branches.

Dave Tovey, used a four-wheel-drive Jeep equipped with chains to check on Elders in Tribal Housing during the snowstorm. They helped transport several Elders to Spirit Mountain Casino, where 30 rooms were set aside for emergency use.

"It was just the nastiest thing I've seen out here," Sheker said. "All in all, we got to as many Elders as we could."

Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg, who lives in Grand Meadows, said he was down to one day's worth of insulin before Tribal Pharmacy staff reached the Health & Wellness Clinic and dispensed needed medications.

Tribal Health Executive Director Mark Johnston said Pharmacist Chuck Sheffield, Pharmacy Director Julie Davis and Pharmacy Technician Faith Goodman worked four hours on Friday, Dec. 19, to fill urgent prescription requests for Tribal member patients.

Patient Account Representative Tauni McCammon and Medical Secretary Michelle Sweeney came in each day to call patients to let them know that the clinic was

closed, he said.

Leno, Sheker and Soderberg said the experience will prompt them to work with other Tribal Council members in creating an emergency plan that might include using the new Elders' Activity Center or Tribal gymnasium as possible emergency shelters for Elders. Both sites have backup generators.

"If we're going to put together a community, we need to be responsible to take care of that community," Vice Chairman Reyn Leno said. "It will have to be a combination of Housing, Governance and the casino."

Sheker said any emergency plan needs to address basic needs, such as food, heat and medication for Elders.

"All Elders need to be protected," Soderberg said.

Mercier said the Tribe has adopted the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Incident Management System and might want to discuss how to implement its emergency response standards within the community.

Younger said the storm created

some "real challenges." He identified snow removal, a call-out phone tree and establishing priorities as issues that will need to be addressed to improve service to Tribal Housing residents during emergency situations.

"The winter weather that we experienced in the past two weeks was unusual," Younger said. "The cold temperatures and uncommonly high amounts of snow created some real challenges. This also gave us opportunity to reflect on what procedural changes would be necessary to improve the quality of service."

The snowy conditions, combined with periods of freezing rain, also made the drive into Grand Ronde treacherous for Tribal employees and Tribal members living in the McMinnville, Salem and Lincoln City areas.

Mercier said he was stuck in his Willamina Creek home without power or phone service until Tuesday, Dec. 23.

Important seasonal Tribal events, including the Dec. 21 Tribal Council Christmas Party, were canceled because the inclement weather made driving dangerous.

Other canceled events included the Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority Board of Commissioners meeting scheduled for Dec. 23.

A combination of cold air, snow and rain started creating dicey conditions and prompted closure of the Tribal campus a week before on Monday, Dec. 15. Employees worked partial days on Tuesday and Wednesday, Dec. 16-17, and started at 10 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 18, before being sent home early as snowfall intensified in the afternoon.

The Tribe was not alone. The Willamina School District, with its middle school in Grand Ronde, canceled classes for the entire week

The West Valley Veterans' Memorial is seen through a tree branch that broke off a tree in front of the Governance Center.

Photos by Bob McElderry



The Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center is blanketed with snow.

of Dec. 15-19, giving students a three-week Christmas break.

Other Tribal activities scheduled for that week were affected.

Per capita distribution on Wednesday, Dec. 17, started at 1 p.m. because weather delayed arrival of checks from New Mexico. The distribution ended at 4 p.m. so Member Services employees could mail checks that were not picked up.

Canceled or rescheduled events that week included the Tribal Library's "Book Talk" on Thursday, Dec. 18; the Education Department's "Talk 101" event on Dec. 19 and High School Guys' and Girls' nights slated for Dec. 19-21.

In addition, Tribal Council moved its Dec. 17 meeting from 4 p.m. to 1 p.m. to allow employees and Tribal members to get home safely during daylight hours.

The weather also delayed delivery of the Dec. 15 *Smoke Signals* in the Grand Ronde area, preventing Publications employees from picking up and distributing the newspaper until Thursday, Dec. 18.

However, some Tribal employees made it to work every day, such as the Adult Foster Care staff.

Adult Foster Care Director Shirley Walkhoff said in an e-mail that Jonathan Taylor braved the weather, driving in from Salem nightly.

"Thank you to Linda Shelly, who stayed over and worked extra for those who couldn't make it in," Walkhoff said. "We know when the going gets tough, the tough get going."

"A huge thank you to the caregivers who have braved this weather every day without fail and have been there for the residents 24-7. Thank you Anna Huston, Alice Meyer, Brianna Leno, Brandi Bishop, Brenna Stone, Carmen Parren, Dawn LaChance, Diane Walker, Eleanor Ashman, Flicka LaBonte, Kristen Micik, Linda Shelly, Leslie Nelson ... you are truly dedicated to our program."

Walkhoff also thanked the Housing Maintenance Crew for keeping the sidewalks and parking lot clear.

"Lonnie Leno, Randy Bean, Kevin Ruggles and Joe Lane have been doing an awesome job of keeping the sidewalks and parking lot clear. They had to clear the sidewalks

several times as the snow kept falling."

Tribal Payroll Specialist Georgene Sanders, who lives in Sheridan, made it to work on Dec. 19, 22 and 24, the last day to hand out checks to employees without direct deposit.

Sanders said the conditions were "pretty treacherous," with the combination of snow, ice and rutted roads.

She said about 40 employees showed up on Dec. 24 to pick up their checks, and General Manager Chris Leno drove in from Salem and took checks back with him for Tribal employees who live in that area.

"As bad as it was in Sheridan, it was just as bad here," Sanders said, who reported 2 feet of snow at her Sheridan home.

"I came out in a four-wheel drive and it was definitely 25 mph the whole way," she said.

Procurement Supervisor Kevin Mueller and Chris Leno helped ensure Tribal employees were paid on time despite the harsh weather conditions.

Chris Leno also went door-to-door, checking on Tribal Elders and delivering prescriptions, said Social Services Manager Dave Fullerton.

Mercier, who lives in Willamina Creek, made it to Grand Ronde

on Tuesday, Dec. 23, picking up a Tribal Elder's prescription in Willamina along the way.

Central Phones Operator and Tribal member Carla Roberts walked over to the Governance Center from Tribal Housing to change the Tribal Council Christmas Party announcement on the Reader Board on Dec. 20, helping to alert Tribal members of the cancellation.

Lt. Juan Sifuentes said Tribal security personnel helped in Tribal Housing by shoveling residents out of their homes and freeing stuck cars.

Sifuentes, who lives in Salem, said he and his staff all drive four-wheel-drive vehicles with chains.

"We pulled together and got through it," he said.

"It was a team effort," Sheker said. "People banded together."

Tribal Housing resident and Tribal member Julie Little took pictures of the snowfall at Tribal Housing while Tribal Grants Developer Bob McElderry also snapped pictures of the campus buried beneath a layer of white.

"I have lived in Grand Ronde and the vicinity many years of my life and this is the most snow I have ever seen here," Little said in an e-mail.

"We had about 2 feet although it is packed down now due to the ice from the freezing rain. We have

about 1.5 feet now. Getting around in housing is not fun. Highways 18 and 22 are closed from Grand Ronde to the coast. I am ready for this to go away."

Other Tribal Housing residents reported sporadic power outages and prolonged cable TV and phone outages during the storm.

Younger said power to Elder Foster Care and sanitation services was interrupted.

Tribal employees and Grand Ronde area residents were not the only ones affected by the weather.

Spirit Mountain Casino Chief Executive Officer Rodney Ferguson told *The Oregonian*, "The days before Christmas are usually slow and the weather just slowed it down even more so."

Casino shuttle buses from Portland were suspended because of the icy roads and Spirit Mountain Lodge was half-filled with guests and half-filled with stranded staff members.

"We were down 72 percent in headcount last week compared to the same period in 2007," Ferguson said. "It was definitely due to the weather and poor road conditions."

Emergency phone service also was out in much of the West Valley area, including Grand Ronde, and the state Department of Transportation closed highways 18 and 22 west of Grand Ronde during the worst parts of the storm.

Tribal facilities, however, weathered the storm without too much damage. Tribal Council Vice Chairman Reyn Leno reported only seeing a few damaged gutters on Tribal buildings.

Several downed tree limbs littered the Tribal campus and housing areas on Monday, Dec. 29, as the last remnants of the snow continued melting.

"(Supervisor) Curtis Rentsch and his people are reviewing and cleaning up messes," Younger said. "Curtis is making the necessary contractor contacts to restore systems to their right conditions. (Manager) Mike Larsen is in constant contact with the Facilities team to ensure requests are being met. I commend all for the extra effort provided."

Soderberg summed up the feeling throughout the Grand Ronde area on Monday.

"I'm glad to see it gone," he said ■



Although the snow storm caused problems for adults, it created play opportunities for local youth, such as Kayla Valdez, 4, who sits atop a snow turtle built in her front yard on Saturday, Dec. 20.

Photo by George Valdez