

## Tribal Court Awareness Day provides information

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

For a Tribal Court that handles all kinds of legal issues for Tribal members and the community, foster care cases represent the biggest and most intransigent challenge.

The 47 children currently under Tribal Court jurisdiction live as close as Grand Ronde, but as far away as Texas.

"The court's jurisdiction extends to where the child resides," Tribal Court Programs Specialist Julie Boekhoff said.

Nationwide, only two in 10 children in foster care succeed in later life, according to statistics provided by the court. Eight of the 10 will end up dead, in jail or homeless.

Still, said Tribal member and Member Services Department Manager Debby Larsen, who also is a member of two Tribal Court volunteer programs, "If you help one or two, it's worth it."

In recent years, Tribal Court has set up three volunteer programs — the Tribal Member Review Board, Court Appointed Special Advocates and Peacemaker Program.

The Review Board, established in 2005, enables Tribal members to review cases of Tribal children in Tribal custody.

"The reviews take place in a less formal setting, providing an atmosphere that is both confidential and conducive for the interaction of everyone involved," says a Tribal Court program information sheet.

The Special Advocates program, established in 2008, tasks volunteers with staying involved in a case and, when necessary, advocating for the child.

The Peacemaker Program, also established at the Tribe last year, provides "a non-adversarial way to resolve disputes. It is intended to reflect the Tribe's tradition of using respected members of the community to heal conflicts among its members," says a Tribal Court program information sheet.

For Tribal Elder Joann Mercier, a Review Board member: "To see them in court, that makes all of this worth it. You may work on a case for two or three years, and know everything about that kid, but seeing their smiling faces (when we've solved a problem) — nothing even comes close."

The comments came on Tuesday, April 14, during Tribal Court Awareness Day, when the department described to Tribal and community members the programs that have been developed to serve the community.

"Tribal Court fees are considerably less than state court fees and there is no fee to utilize the Peacemaker Program," Boekhoff said, "for name changes, divorces and dispute resolution, to mention a few."

Tribal Court also runs an indigent defense program that provides attorneys for abuse and neglect cases.

There is a current focus on pro-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Tribal Elder Alan Ham reads a tag that represents a child who is a ward of the Tribal Court during Tribal Court Awareness Day on Tuesday, April 14. There are currently 47 children in care of Tribal Court. On the left is Tribal member Debby Larsen, who is a volunteer on the Tribal Member Review Board and is a Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer.**

viding civil judges and attorney information about sensitive cultural issues.

Tribal Court also performs deed recording for house purchases and files Uniformed Commercial Code documents.

On Tribal Court's wish list, said Tribal member and Tribal Court Administrator Angela Fasana, are a drug court and an expansion of

authority that would allow the court to handle custody disputes in cases where no divorce is involved.

Mercier, now Security Director at Spirit Mountain Casino, used to work in the Tribe's Social Services Department. She said she remembers "the first court down at the manor. They held court in the lunchroom." ■

## Cultural Corner

### Beginning Twining Basketry Class

The Cultural Resources Department will be hosting Tribal member Sam Henry in teaching a beginning basketry class.

Grand Ronde  
May 2  
Education room 126  
9 A.M. - 3 P.M.

Portland  
May 9  
9 A.M. - 3 P.M.

Bring a sack lunch and good scissors  
Limit to 15 people per office.  
RSVP to Misty Thorsgard 503-879-2320

### Chinuk Wawa

Portland  
Wednesdays  
Classes begin May 6  
4 - 8 P.M.

Eugene  
Thursdays  
Classes begin May 7  
4 - 8 P.M.

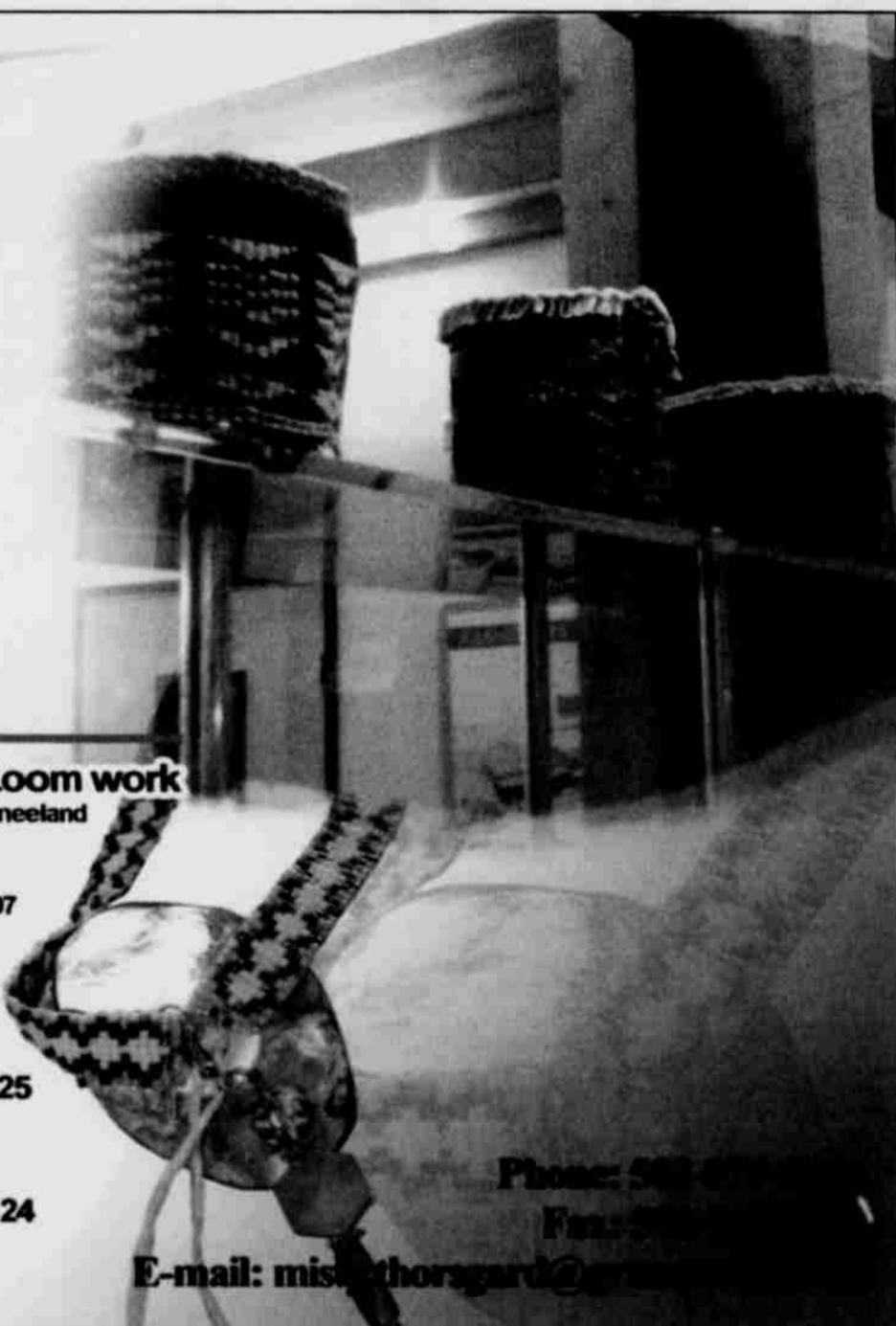
### Beginning Loom work

Instructor: CeCe Kneeland

Grand Ronde  
Education room 207  
May 19, 26  
June 2  
6 - 8 P.M.

Portland  
June 4, 11, 18, 25  
6 - 8 P.M.

Eugene  
June 3, 10, 17, 24  
6 - 8 P.M.



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