

Letters

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

A tribute to Delmer Croy:

Both in stature and character, he was Kilimanjaro: The majestic mountain rising boldly above both the horizon and the mediocrity of the masses.

He was the oak tree, with deep roots and strong loyalties.

His interests and compassion, like its branches, reached out in all directions and knew no boundaries.

Ever eager to share his wisdom and experience.

Like a tropical climate, Delmer Croy's disposition was warm and sunny with a soothing and refreshing breeze to relax you and put you at ease.

Never too tired or too busy, he was always willing to offer his sympathetic ear to listen, a strong shoulder to lean on.

Words of encouragement were his trademark.

Intelligent, charming, witty — the perfect gentleman.

Husband, father, cousin, friend and gardener, and Green Bay Packer fan.

He touched so many lives and will always be remembered, respected, trusted, loved and appreciated more than he will ever know.

Written by his cousin,

Veronica Gaston

Roll #2332

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I would like to take this time to express my thanks for the ones who helped me when I took a fall at 11 p.m. May 22, 2009, one evening and they found me at 11 a.m. the following day. They are Arte, who was bringing lunch and heard me calling for help, and Pearl, who checks on us Elders weekly, and Marta, my niece, and Randy who let them in upon my calling for help.

I would like to advise anyone who has a Life Alert necklace or etc. Please wear it. I didn't have mine on because I just figured I didn't need it. I really learned the hard way. I spent four days in the hospital, almost three weeks at Hillside Rehab. I wear my Life Alert at all times now.

I thank the Tribal Council, Tribal Elders and friends and family for all my pretty flowers and gifts. Special thanks to our Tribal Housing also.

I really thank everyone who helped me during my hard time.

Please wear your Life Alert.

Norma Billings

Roll #467

Dear fellow members:

I've followed Grand Ronde politics for a few years now, as best I can. It's kind of hard to follow, to be honest. Most of the information you get is hearsay and rumor, as *Smoke Signals* once in a while covers political issues, but not always. The *Tilixam Wawa* comes out only sporadically.

No disrespect intended to my Tribal Council members, but I was shocked at the July 1, 2009, Wednesday night meeting. Some Tribal Council members came out swinging, especially at my dad, Wink Soderberg, and also Chris Mercier.

Me and my brothers have all turned out pretty good. We're all honest, have jobs and take care of our families. We are that way because our father is that way and told us there isn't any better way to be. His brutally honest criticisms I'm sure would take getting used to, but he is always sincere in what he says, and when he's wrong, he'll admit it.

I told Chris Mercier that sometimes these Council meetings seem like reality television shows, and July 1 was no exception. Some of the attacks on my dad and Chris looked rehearsed, and at least one of the other Council members seemed like he was trying to make the meeting get ugly and personal. And what good did it all do? None. I don't get it.

In our culture, we are supposed to respect our Tribal Elders, and when they are on Council I guess we give them double respect. But isn't it supposed to go both ways? Does that mean they don't have to be respectful to others?

I think that we're always going to have mudslinging. I expect it every year, but not from our Tribal Council. In fact, I think Council members are in a position to where they can help set the tone, and I sure hope we get a do-over of the July 1 meeting and this election year. I saw some Council, among others, talk about how they hate mudslinging, and then proceed to mock others' platforms, accuse them of being insincere in their campaigns and then imply they somehow got elected by being dirty. Maybe I heard wrong, so somebody please correct me if so. Chris Mercier was accused of "ruining" someone's life when he got elected! I'm no expert, but I'm pretty sure all that qualifies as mudslinging, no matter how you spin it.

Here's hoping for an honest, open election season where the major issues and challenges confronting our Tribe are what really matter!

Steven Soderberg

Roll #1415

Dear Tribal members:

I hope most people read Wink Soderberg's letter in the June 15 *Smoke Signals*. He raised excellent points that should lead to a healthy discussion about our priorities as a people.

2009 is the first year in recent history that the Tribe has cut programs. The cuts reveal the priorities of Tribal Council and those priorities are misplaced. Tribal Council decided that two program areas were not to be touched, meaning they were the absolute top priorities: Health Care and Elders' Pension.

Health care is a program that I can understand as a priority. We'll probably save some money this year with a new administrator (Shasta) and, hopefully, better lifestyle choices by Tribal members. And how can the health of our people not be our first priority?!

Elders' Pension, however, is a different story. As Councilman Soderberg points out, Grand Ronde Tribal Elders are among the most, if not the most, privileged Tribal Elders in the Northwest. Many receive subsidized rent in Elders' housing, free meals at the casino and Community Center, and Social Security payments like any other American, not to mention per capita payments like everyone else. On top of all this, Tribal Council has decided that every Elder, including myself, needs an additional monthly cash payment; the Elders' Pension.

First of all, most 55 year olds are still working. Social Security doesn't begin payments until 62 years of age. Second, many folks have an excellent pension and don't need the payment. Third, the 2009 budget is largely consumed by the Elders' Pension. And worse yet, we've cut educational and cultural programs for our children.

I believe our Elders' Pension should be based on need, meaning Tribal Elders who really need the money should get it. For example, if a Tribal Elder was living on less than the average income, they should receive a pension to raise their standard of living. But there are many 55+-year-old Tribal members who are working full-time and earning a good living wage that, quite honestly, don't need it. In fact, seven of our nine Tribal Council members receive the Elders' Pension though they all earn twice the average income for the area. The savings from those seven Tribal Council members alone would allow us to continue the Summer Youth Employment program for Grand Ronde children. It was eliminated this year.

Let's be clear on something: I am not advocating that we eliminate the Elders' Pension. What I am advocating for is that we consider a way to make this benefit sustainable, as right now I don't believe it is. Though I will honor discussions held in Executive Session, I see no harm in telling members that the Elders' Pension Endowment lost a lot of money over the past year. There are more problems when you couple that with two things: 1) The endowment, if it ever recovers those losses, will probably not earn the returns as in the past, because Council will probably be investing in low risk/low return, which isn't unwise; 2) A CNN program I watched several months ago projects over the next 10 years the Baby Boomer generation, which includes Tribal Elders, will have so many people reaching retirement age at the same time that costs of Social Security will be too high for the federal government to sustain. If that is the case, then wouldn't the same thing happen to our Elders' Pension? The endowment, like our Health Endowment, is no longer possible to fully fund.

I believe that if we asked our Tribal Elders, they would all be willing to sacrifice a little for the benefit of future generations.

Thank you for your time reading this letter.

Marilyn Portwood

Roll #2915

Youth Canoe Club

Every Wednesday 4- 5 p.m. Youth Education Building

Contact Lisa Leno at 503-879-1471 or Travis Mercier at 503-879-2143 for more information.



**Congrats Johnny,
Angel & Anthony**

Your family is proud of you and love you lots!

GED Classes

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30 – 4 p.m.

Tribal Education Building

Contact Joanne Carr at 503-879-2282 or joanne.carr@grandronde.org