

One baseball diamond on Tribal campus is rounding third with another on deck

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Baseball is returning to the heart of the Tribal campus, and soon beyond.

The Education Division has been using the old powwow grounds as a sports field for Tribal and community youth for years, even bringing in professional athletes to lead athletic clinics.

Now, under the direction of Curtis Rentsch, Tribal Environmental Services supervisor, a baseball diamond is emerging on the west end of the field.

"That's the kind of project I like doing," Rentsch said.

Dayton-based contractor C&D Landscaping, the builder of baseball diamonds at Joe Dancer Park in McMinnville, Dayton High School and Lafayette Commons Park, started the project in April and had the majority of the work completed by the beginning of June, Rentsch said.

"What we did do to help kids get on the field earlier in spring," said C&D owner Cal Kearns, "is we incorporated 10 tons of calcified clay into the infield dirt to improve drainage and allow the surface to dry rapidly."

The clay is an absorbent material, he said, used widely for sports turf.

The dirt infield is more efficient to maintain, Rentsch said, and offers the added advantage of being set up for Little League and softball play. Little League bases are 50 feet apart; softball bases are 60 feet, he said.

Kearns said that the infield is

flexible enough for 90-foot bases that high school and college games require.

With the field essentially done, Rentsch's team is taking on the backstop and fence lines along the first and third base lines, and deciding how to deal with team benches or dugouts, and spectator seating. Volunteers are pitching in, he said.

The field will give the Tribe another venue with which to open up the Tribal campus to the local community, Rentsch said, and this is only one of two baseball fields that Tribal Council has authorized, said Tribal member and Tribal Director of Development Pete Wakeland.

"We've kind of been planning some recreational projects for a couple of years and Tribal Council decided they would like to get two baseball fields done," Wakeland said.

The second will likely be on the Smith property south of Hebo Road and east of Grand Ronde Road, Wakeland said.

"There's an expectation that once the fields are built, and organized activities are planned around them,

that kids in the community will want to start playing ball again," Wakeland said.

"My hope for the recreation program is to have some of the Grand Ronde kids practicing on the field on the way to forming a Grand Ronde Little League team," Rentsch said. "There's definitely some potential there, and if you include the teams in Willamina and Sheridan, this field could get some use."

Rentsch has spoken with Tri-Cities Little League officials about

using the field, and they were enthusiastic, he said.

"The Tri-Cities (Sheridan, Willamina and Grand Ronde) League has a shortage of baseball fields. The only decent fields are at the schools, and during baseball season, they don't allow the little leagues to use the fields."

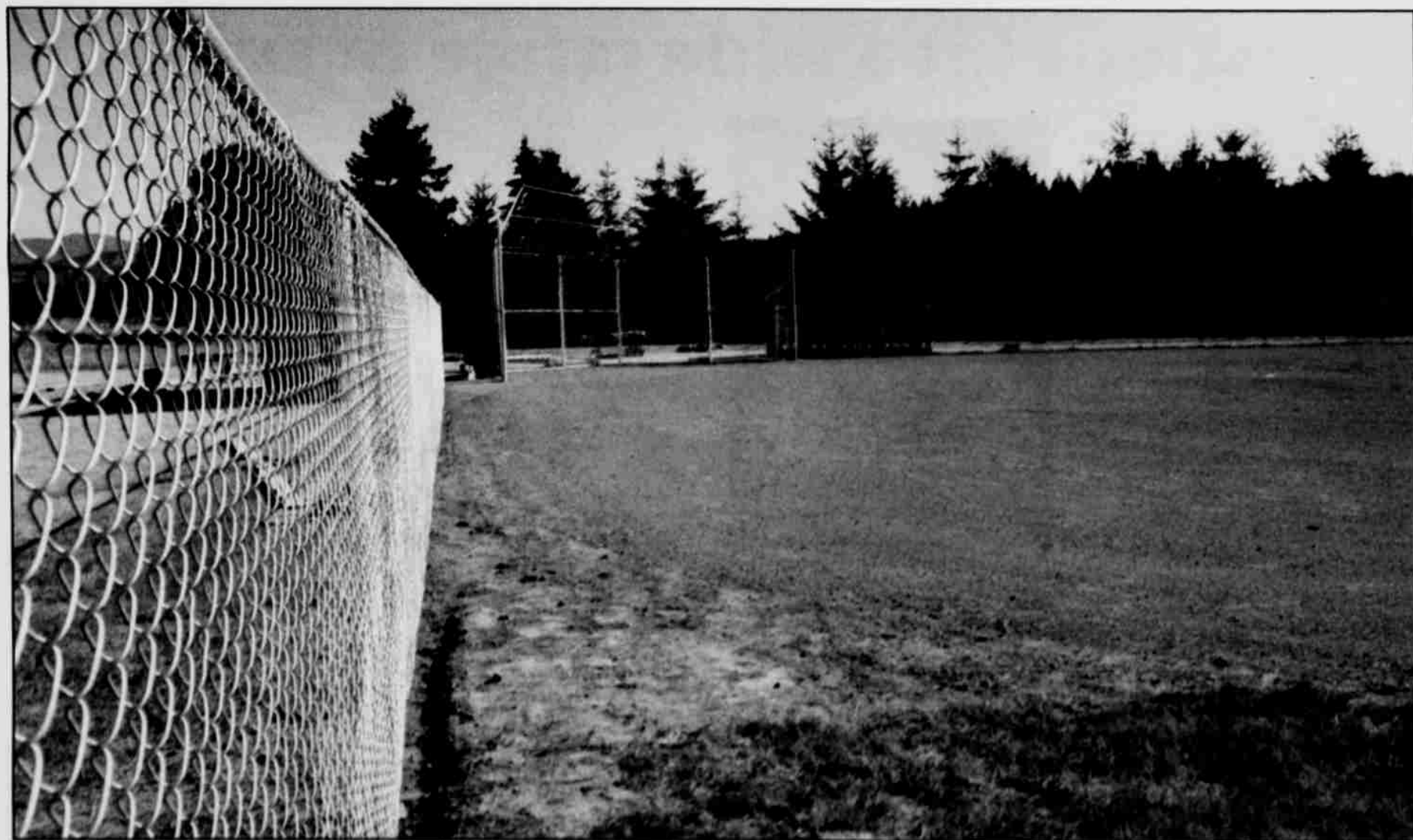
Rentsch said he is already looking forward to scheduling Wednesday evening softball games for the community.

"It's been in demand," he said. ■



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Jimmy Brandon, Tribal member and a maintenance technician for the Tribe, checks to see if a post is level while working on the framework for the backstop of the new baseball field on the Tribal campus.



A baseball diamond has been put in on the west end of the old powwow grounds field on the Tribal campus.