

Tribal Council meets with NAYA rep

Discussion centers on 'self-identified' Native American population of Portland area

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, during a Sept. 22 meeting with Native American Youth Association Executive Director Nichole Maher, recalled sitting in an Oregon Commission on Indian Services meeting earlier this year and hearing some disturbing information.

Oregon Rep. Tina Kotek, D-North Portland, was discussing House Bill 2688, which would have made the Department of Human Services create a reimbursement formula for compensating non-profit community organizations that serve "self-identified" American Indian or Alaskan Native children in the state's foster care system.

The minutes from that March 4, 2009, meeting say that Sue Shaffer, chairwoman of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe, did not feel it was "right" for organizations to use self-identification numbers to reflect Native American peoples served by their resources.

Kennedy said that Tribal governments also should be recognized as local governments when state grants and funding are being offered, especially for services that pertain to Tribal members and their families. She noted that Grand Ronde has a satellite office in the Portland area that could provide services to Tribal members.

Kotek's Native American population numbers in Oregon were higher than those Kennedy and representatives from the other eight federally recognized Tribes who sit on the Commission recognized.

"It was a misclassification of people who do not go through the rigorous process like members of the Grand Ronde Tribe," Kennedy told Maher in Tribal Council Chambers.

"Being an Indian takes further research. It is not just a given. Counting people who are self-disclosed as Native doesn't have a lot of merit."

Maher, making her first visit

to the Grand Ronde Tribe in more than seven years as NAYA executive director, distributed material that cited U.S. Census Bureau statistics that said the Portland metropolitan statistical area in 2000 included 19,209 Native Americans of one race and 38,926 multi-racial Native Americans.

"We represent varying degrees of Tribal affiliation," NAYA's literature says. "Some of us are Tribally enrolled and some of us are not, but we all have ancestral ties to our Tribes. Some of us are enrolled members of local Tribes ... but many of us are members or descendants of more distant Tribes."

"The number of Natives as self-disclosed is almost 40,000," Kennedy said. "The Census doesn't bear these numbers out; nor does the state of Oregon. It is faulty data."

Maher said there are two different ways of counting Native Americans in the Portland area and the population probably ranges from 16,000 to 39,000, including almost 11,000 Alaska Natives.

"The number is probably somewhere in the middle," Maher said. "A lot of people don't self-identify themselves as Native on the Census."

Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor asked how NAYA identifies its clients as Native.

Maher said the social services organization asks for Tribal affiliation, roll numbers and proof of descendancy, but if clients do not have that, NAYA cannot deny services since it is funded by government grants.

"Ninety-seven percent of our clients have identified with a Tribe,"



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Nichole Maher, Native American Youth Association executive director, visited with Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, Tribal Vice Chair Reyn Leno, Tribal Secretary Kathleen Tom and Tribal Council members Steve Bobb Sr. and Chris Mercier in the Tribal Council Conference Room on Tuesday, Sept. 22.

she said. "We have a very Native-centric environment."

The Native American Youth Association Family Center was founded by parent volunteers in 1974. In 1994, it became an official charitable organization with 501c (3) status that serves "self-identified" Native American youth and their families in the Portland area, which is in the ceded homelands of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

The organization's Web site says it serves more than 1,400 youth and their families from more than 380 Tribal backgrounds annually.

NAYA has offices at 5135 N.E. Columbia Blvd. Maher said the organization just purchased its building and 10 acres, which includes remnants of a former Chinook village site.

"We support urban areas," Kennedy said. "Many of our members live in Multnomah County," citing the federal government's relocation policies of the 1950s.

More than 500 Grand Ronde Tribal members live in the Census Bureau's Portland metropolitan statistical area, which includes Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, as well as Clark County in Washington state.

Maher, an Alaskan Native de-

scendant from Ketchikan who moved to the Siletz Reservation when she was 11, said she wants NAYA to work with the Grand Ronde Tribe in supporting urban Indians in the Portland metro area who have social service needs.

NAYA offers employment, housing, educational, domestic violence, parenting and foster care services, but not health, drug or alcohol treatment.

"We are not a Tribe," Maher said. "We behave similarly to other non-profits in the community working in the Multnomah County and Portland area. We provide services that are not provided by the county or city."

"We're not eligible for funds that Tribes are eligible for. We do not compete with Tribes. We're trying to increase the amount of money in Portland (for Native Americans)."

Maher said NAYA has about 100 employees and about 85 percent are Native American.

"We are building a strong Native American community in Portland," she said.

Maher said NAYA has served 216 enrolled Grand Ronde Tribal members in 2009 and 86 people who said they were associated with the Grand Ronde Tribe.

NAYA owns 44 low-income housing units in the Portland area and three Grand Ronde Tribal members live in the housing, she added.

Maher said she was thankful to the Grand Ronde Tribe, through its philanthropic arm of Spirit Mountain Community Fund, for two recent grants — a \$25,000 grant in 2007 that supported its technological infrastructure and another \$75,000 grant in 2008 that created an Elders program.

Kennedy, who gave Maher a Tribal information packet that included the Tribe's ceded lands map, said Tribal Council will schedule a visit in the near future to NAYA's facilities in north Portland.

Other Tribal Council members attending the meeting were Vice Chair Reyn Leno, Tribal Council Secretary Kathleen Tom, Steve Bobb Sr. and Chris Mercier.

"We'd love to have a deeper relationship with the Grand Ronde Tribe," Maher said. "I hope we can work together to accomplish a great task. ... If any issues come up, call me. I will not be insulted. ... We are here as a resource for you." ■

Cultural Resources seeks plankhouse giveaway items

In anticipation of an early fall opening of the Grand Ronde plankhouse, the Tribe's Cultural Resources Department is seeking donations of giveaway items for the planned blessing ceremony.

Giveaway items can be about almost anything, including beads and blankets, but not alcohol or drugs.

The items are intended to recognize people from outside the Grand Ronde community who will come for the blessing ceremony.

"By having people from outside the community, they are helping to strengthen our house," said Tribal member and Cultural Resources Protection Coordinator Eirik Thorsgard.

Giveaway items can be dropped off at the Cultural Resources Department in Grand Ronde or at the Tribal satellite offices in Eugene and Portland.

For more information or to check on the appropriateness of possible giveaway items, call Thorsgard at 503-879-1630 or Language & Culture Specialist Bobby Mercier at 503-879-2076.

An article on proper plankhouse protocol written by Cultural Resources Department staff will appear in *Smoke Signals* closer to the blessing ceremony. ■

Tribal landscaping contractors wanted

CSLLC is seeking proposals from licensed Landscape Contractors to solicit proposals for Landscaping Services at its Chemawa Station Property in Keizer, Ore. Contractors that are owned by or employ Tribal members and wish to be included on this list are requested to call Lew Younger at 503-879-2099. Please indicate your business name, address, telephone, fax, name(s) of Tribal members employed and roll number if available. Bids are due on Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2009. ■