

Grand Ronde hopping with construction

General Council briefed on several projects, including new fire station

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Although work on Grand Ronde Road is complete, area residents will not see much of a break in construction activity as work begins this fall on several Tribal projects.

Tribal member and Tribal Director of Development Peter Wakeland and Tribal member and Tribal Public Works Director Lewis Younger briefed Tribal members on the myriad projects occurring this fall, winter and spring during the Oct. 4 General Council meeting held in the Tribal Community Center.

Projects include construction of a new fire station in Grand Ronde and expansion work on the Tribal Community Center and Tribal Health & Wellness Center.

Wakeland first tackled the new fire station, which the Tribe will build at 28480 McPherson Road.

Wakeland said the fire station will enhance fire protection and emergency medical services in the Grand Ronde area by reducing response times from West Valley Fire District staff stationed in Willamina. It also will provide career training and opportunities for Tribal members, improve protection of Spirit Mountain Casino, and save lives and property.

The Tribe will construct and furnish the 5,642-square-foot building, as well as buy a new fire truck and ambulance to be stationed in Grand Ronde. The West Valley Fire District will operate the station and provide administration and training.

Wakeland said the budget for the fire station is \$2.7 million, with construction accounting for \$1 million.

The single-story fire station will include two bays, two offices and three dorm rooms that can house six people. The station will be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by two fire district employees. The station will employ six staffers, all of whom will be firefighters. Four of them also will be certified emergency medical technicians. The Tribe will pay the cost of employee salaries.

Wakeland said the fire station will be completed in March 2010 with occupancy slated for April.

Tribal member Eric Bernando asked if the new firefighting equipment will quell previous concerns about the fire district's ability to properly respond to an emergency at Spirit Mountain Casino.

Wakeland said that the Tribe's purchase of a new fire truck with a ladder and aerial water capabilities has "gone a long way in improving our relationship with the fire district."

Tribal Elder Violet Folden asked what would happen to the Tribe's recycling center at the corner of Grand Ronde and McPherson roads during construction of the fire station.

Wakeland said the recycling



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Tribal member and Tribal Director of Development Peter Wakeland discusses construction of a new fire station in Grand Ronde during the Oct. 4 General Council meeting in the Tribal Community Center. The Tribe and West Valley Fire District are working together to build and permanently staff the fire station on McPherson Road.

center would be moved temporarily during construction and, longer term, might return to a site near the fire station.

Wakeland added that any Tribal members interested in information about Chemeketa Community College's two-year firefighter program should contact him.

From the fire station, Younger took over and quickly briefed Tribal members about the construction projects occurring at the Community Center and Health & Wellness Center.

Younger said the more than 2,000-square-foot Indian Child Welfare offices expansion to the south side of the Tribal Community Center would begin construction on or around Oct. 20 and be completed in March 2010. The expansion is funded by a \$500,000 federal block grant with \$167,000 in matching Tribal funds.

The expansion will allow for better confidentiality and security for Indian Child Welfare workers and clients, Younger said.

Expansion work on the Tribal Health & Wellness Center will include three projects - dental wing addition, Wellness Program office expansion and reconstruction of the Tribal Pharmacy. A combination of U.S. Housing and Urban Development, Indian Health Service, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and federal block grants are paying for most of the work.

Younger praised Tribal Planning & Grants Development Manager Kim Rogers for garnering more than \$2 million in federal grants for the expansion work while only obligating \$242,254 in Tribal funds.

In addition to the building expansions and remodels, the Health & Wellness Clinic will receive a new seam metal roof, upgraded heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and new carpeting funded by \$844,000 in grants.

Younger said the dental expansion work should start Nov. 1 and be finished by March 2010. It will add 1,900 square feet to the dental wing and seven state-of-the-art dental operatories.

Work on the Wellness Office expansion, which will also add 1,900 square feet to the medical wing, will add five new exam rooms, a physical therapy room, six new offices and a waiting and conference room. Younger said the project is currently in the design phase.

"What are these projects about? They are about the membership," Younger said. "That's us. Our children. Our children's children. They are about comfort, convenience and confidentiality."

Tribal member Bryan Mercier asked if the Tribe has made a financial commitment to maintain and keep the expanded programs going.

Tribal Health & Wellness Assistant Executive Director Allyson

Lecatsas said that the expanded programs, such as dental with seven more chairs and the larger Pharmacy, should pay for themselves.

"For the Pharmacy, if we have more inventory, hopefully more Tribal members will use the Pharmacy," she said. "That will save the Tribe a tremendous amount of money because we pay government pricing (for drugs) and not retail."

Lecatsas said that the only new employees required by the expansion projects will be one new full-time dentist and a full-time dental assistant.

Health & Wellness Executive Director Mark Johnston has previously said that increased client numbers and income should pay for any new employees.

Tribal member and Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Shelley Hanson asked if the Tribe was incorporating green technologies into the expansion construction projects.

Younger said it would cost the Tribe 15 percent more to build green and increase construction delays by 30 percent.

Younger said it was wiser to construct the buildings now with the federal grants awarded and then use future grants to retrofit the buildings with green technology, such as solar power cells on the roofs.

However, Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker said the Tribe should "build it green to begin with" while Hanson encouraged Tribal Council to develop construction policies "to support our standards of being good stewards of the land" by incorporating green technologies in the upfront costs of future projects.

Younger said that some of the work, such as the air system improvements to the Health & Wellness Center, will be green in that it they will upgrade effectiveness from about 80 percent to 95 percent.

"This will improve customer comfort throughout the building and reduce the cost of utilities," he said.

In other action:

- Tribal Elders Ken Gregg and Nadine McNutt and guest Heather Holaway won the \$50 door prizes and Tribal member Bryan Mercier won the \$100 door prize. Gregg donated his prize to the Grand Ronde Food Bank while Mercier donated his prize to the Grand Ronde Library.

- The next General Council meeting will be held 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 1, in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde. ■

Save the date!

**26th Tribal Restoration Celebration
Sunday, Nov. 22, Tribal Gymnasium.**

Contact Public Affairs at 503-879-1418 for more information or see upcoming article in *Smoke Signals*.