

Forum draws 'small but powerful' group

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

In response to a promise by President Barack Obama in a Dec. 3 speech, the Grand Ronde community gave voice on Jan. 5 to what is and is not working in the local community's economy.

On the bright side, said Tribal member and Mentorship/Workforce Development Coordinator Denise Harvey, "quite a bit" of funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, better known as the federal stimulus package, came to Grand Ronde during the summer and fall, and "is keeping youth working so they do have skills when the jobs come back."

On the other hand, Tribal member and Tribal Director of Development Peter Wakeland said, "The success of the (stimulus) strategy is debatable. There are things we could do here to stimulate jobs, but federal restrictions for using the money put up barriers."

"I really liked the mixture of concern and hope that I heard here tonight," said moderator Vicki Willis, principal in the Salem-based consulting and facilitation firm of Willis, Green & Associates. "It was a small, but powerful group."

Thirteen attended, including Tribal and Spirit Mountain Casino employees and Tribal Elders.

The statements came during a 90-minute session at the Tribal Education Center. The forum followed a guide provided by the White House to respond to President Obama's promise to "explore every possible avenue" for job creation, to "identify opportunities and obstacles," as well as present "ideas and perspectives" for new job growth.

The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde joined thousands of governmental entities across the country in responding to the formal White House request in December.

A recent forum on the subject held by U.S. Rep. David Wu, D-Ore., drew only a slightly greater number of participants.

Many of the answers will not surprise anybody following the regional economy in recent years.

In response to the question about what in the President's Jobs Forum on Dec. 3 is relevant to the local community, participants named loss of natural resource-based and manufacturing jobs, transportation within rural communities and into nearby cities, and the loss of small businesses.

In response to a question about what areas of the economy are thriving, none were cited. The casino, Tribal government and Tribal projects were said to be holding their own, with dollars at the casino moving from gaming to restaurants and other forms of entertainment, including Tribal art and cultural items, and from higher cost to lower cost venues.

Hardest hit in the community are the natural resources and manufacturing facilities, including local logging operations, as well as small businesses. Sadly, the repaving of the Salmon River Highway, normally the kind of transportation project that provides a boost to the local economy, walled off businesses at Fort Hill, closing one going business.

Schools have laid off support staff. Tribal and casino Human Resources departments used to receive regular job advertisements

from the community. They don't anymore.

Lost employment also has rippled through the community. It has sent young adults back to the homes of their parents, and increased hunger and homelessness. Idle time has allowed some young and old alike to pass time with illicit drugs and alcohol. Disappointment with job prospects has translated into domestic violence and greater numbers flirting with incarceration.

An upside promise also exists, participants said. Some prospects for growth and opportunities in the community have and will continue to come from stimulus funding, including construction, human services and youth employment.

Wakeland said he expects to see slow growth in the timber industry in the years ahead, after many years of unprofitable prices and lost jobs.

The Tribe may benefit from embarking on the growing green technology sector. Training is needed to ready local workers for the new jobs, and expansion in this area may foster expansion in other local

enterprises.

Continuing to hold back the local economic engine, said Tribal Elder Jolanda Catabay, an office assistant at the Tribal health clinic, are high gas prices that present an obstacle to bringing goods, services and employees into the community.

Tribal member and casino Guest Services buyer Perri McDaniel said the area needs "technical assistance for businesses," and under any circumstances, it is going to be difficult for small businesses to compete with pay and benefits offered by the Tribe and casino.

Funding from both stimulus dollars and private investment will benefit the area, McDaniel said. That means "more SBA (Small Business Administration) funds for Enterprise Zone businesses," she said. She also sees community benefits to increased funding for Tribal historic preservation.

"I wish we had a good grocery store out here," said Tribal Elder Betty Bly.

The report was set to be presented to the White House as *Smoke Signals* went to press. ■

Attention Tribal members

Copies of Legislative Action Committee recommendations are available on the Tribal member side of the Tribal Web site. They are located with the Legislative Action Committee minutes.

These forms are only a recommendation used by the Legislative Action Committee to move discussion items to a regular Tribal Council meeting for a vote of the Tribal Council.

If you have any questions, please contact Dakota Whitecloud, Tribal Council Relations Coordinator, for more information.

You may reach Whitecloud at 503-879-1309 or 1-800-422-0232, ext. 1309. ■

Goal is to have 75 fans by Feb. 1

FACEBOOK continued
from front page

Hanson said the Community Fund site on Facebook also wants to hear from Tribal members.

"Do you have an interesting piece of Tribal history to share, or a moving story of volunteerism? You can write on our wall, post pictures and videos, or take our poll to tell us what you want to know about," she said.

The Facebook page uses an image of Tribal Elder and former Tribal Council member Leon "Chip" Tom wrapped in a red Tribal blanket as its image.

Tom has become the "face" of Spirit Mountain Community Fund through appearances in TV commercials and billboards.

As of early January, the Community Fund Facebook page had 37 fans and Hanson said she would like to have enlisted 75 fans by Feb. 1.

"Tell your friends and family to say hello on our wall," she said.

The Community Fund hired Holly Caughron, founder of Green Rising Marketing, to assist in creation of the Facebook page. ■



A screenshot of the Spirit Mountain Community Fund's Facebook page.