Community Fund reaching out for diversity

By Ron Karten
Smoke Signals staff writer

As a granting agency, Spirit Mountain Community Fund has embarked on an effort "to promote diversity among grantees," said Program Officer Louis King.

"And we're seeing changes in the responses of grant applicants since we started including it in our applications a few years ago as a desired attribute of the organizations we fund," King said.

One of the latest success stories has been the Audubon Society of Portland.

"By and large," said Meryl Reddish, executive director for the Audubon Society, "we're a pretty homogenized group. There's not much diversity internally. We do partner with some audiences and have strong partnerships with some other NGOs (non-government organizations), including affordable housing groups (that represent diverse clientele), but there's a lot more we can do."

In February, the Community Fund awarded the Audubon Society $29,500 to embark on a plan that would put the agency's 25 staffers, 15 board members and approximately 10 volunteers through diversity training.

The society has committed to an equity audit that will look at its policies and practices to reveal strengths and weaknesses with regard to agency-wide diversity.

Finally, the group will use the funding to help open its first satellite office in East Portland, where the demographics are more inclusive than in the West Hills neighborhood where the Audubon Society of Portland has had its base "for pretty much 100 years," said Reddish.

Meanwhile, at the April 28 Community Fund meeting held at the Deepwood House in Salem, Marcelo Bonta, executive director for the Center for Diversity and the Environment, described his agency's efforts. He was the first grantee to speak at a Community Fund meeting.

Bonta, whose agency received a $40,000 capacity building grant from the Community Fund in 2009, described how organizations get overwhelmed when trying to deal with too many diversity issues at once.

His focus since college has been environmental work, he said, but in every environmental organization he worked at, he noticed a real scarcity of people of color, and often a complete absence at the top levels.

By hosting forums, Bonta is now connecting the environmental movement with the broader community.

With two full-time staff members, Bonta focuses on leadership development, policies and community building aspects of diversity.

"The dialogue is starting to happen," Bonta said. "They understand the why of diversity, but they're asking, 'How do I do it?'

"Numbers (of employees of color) are a piece of the answer," he added, "but also the number of communities of color that agencies are working with. Practices, outcomes and funding all play a part."

For its part, Spirit Mountain Community Fund is collaborating with the Northwest Health Foundation and other funders to produce a report detailing funding dollars going to communities of color. It is scheduled for release this summer.

Asked about what kind of "push back" Bonta is seeing from agencies fighting the effort, he said that they call it "mission drift."

"We tell them that it will help them with their mission. There's a lot of support for the idea, but not that much action yet," he said.

Bonta said that success starts on the personal level. "We get to know each other personally, and that's where it starts. You get a little impatient, but it works. It's better if you think on a longer horizon."

Having a President of color is helping to drive the current effort, he said. With many federal agency leaders also being of color, you see that Obama is walking the walk.

Programming and funding dollars are placing much more emphasis on communities of color.

"They're providing the opportunity to have the conversation," Bonta said. "Finally, funding sources and models are out there."

Today, he said, the United States is 34 percent people of color. By 2042, population experts predict, the country will be of 50 percent people of color.

On the Community Fund Board of Trustees, six of eight members are people of color. ■

Health committee plans meeting in Grand Ronde

The Oregon Health Improvement Plan Committee, which includes Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy as a member, will host a Community Listening Session in Grand Ronde on Thursday, June 24.

The session will gather public input, which will guide an action plan to improve the lifelong health of Oregonians as one of several Oregon Health Authority initiatives.

Other Community Listening Sessions will be held June 10 in Bend.

The Oregon Health Improvement Plan Committee is providing leadership, direction and oversight for the development of the Oregon Health Improvement Plan.

The committee is directed by the Oregon Health Policy Board, a nine-member governor-appointed board that provides guidance to the Oregon Health Authority.

More information about the Health Improvement Plan Committee, as well as dates and locations for meetings, can be found at www.oregon.gov/OHA. ■

2010 Food Preservation Classes

Grand Ronde Community Resource Center's Garden House
(Next to Community Garden)
10 A.M. – 2 P.M.

June 12 – Rhubarb (jam & pie filling)
July 17 – Condiments (mustard, corn relish & jalapeno jelly)
July 24 – Bread (Artisan, Sourdough, Potato)
Aug. 14 – Pickles (dill pickles & jardiniere)
Sept. 18 – Sausage (Chorizo, Italian, Breakfast, Portugese Linguiza)
Sept. 25 – Apples (applesauce & pie filling)
Oct. 10 – Pears (butter, canned & jam)

Will accept a maximum of 10 people per class

Everything is provided, however, feel free to bring any fruit/berries, vegetables or jars that you would like to use
Lunch will be provided

Classes are limited to those individuals who meet USDA Commodity income eligibility i.e. receive Food Stamps or food boxes.

SIGN ME UP! Please contact GRCRC staff - Patrice or Angie at 503-879-5731 to sign up for classes

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