

# 'Grand opening' lasted 3 days

**PLANKHOUSE**  
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sive ways.

Allison now is in her second year of medical school at the University of California, San Francisco, funded by a Fulbright Scholarship.

Tribal member and Language and Culture Specialist Bobby Mercier, who had the lead on plankhouse issues in recent years, has emerged as a leader for the Tribe's Canoe Family and, in many ways, for all Tribal youth.

"Bobby's a pretty good leader for the young people," said Tribal Elder Margaret Provost, who led the Tribe's successful Restoration effort that culminated in 1983. "It's very hard to organize young people."

Tribal member Eirik Thorsgard, Cultural Protection coordinator and Interim Tribal Historic Preservation officer for the Tribe, is now a Ph.D. candidate at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia. Thorsgard also played a leading role in this plankhouse creation.

The plankhouse "grand opening" started Friday night with the arrival of Indians from the Muckle-shoot, Makah, Swinomish, Tulalip, Squaxin Island, Yakama and Chehalis Tribes in Washington, from the Stolo Nation in British Columbia and from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

Grand Ronde hosted guests to meals through the weekend at the Tribal Community Center until Sunday evening, when a giveaway for Tribal Elders, special guests and the community honored the first official dinner served in the plankhouse itself.

"Thanks to the cooks," said Mike Edwards, Cultural coordinator for the Muckleshoot Tribe. "I know you're not starving here."

In between came good words and deeds from dozens of participants, including Tribal missionary minister John P. Cayou (Swinomish), first among guests to offer blessings to the Grand Ronde Tribe's new plankhouse.

"Each time we share something in a good way it is medicine for our hearts," he said. Together, with his nephew, Stolo Nation member Philip Lockerby, who used a cedar bough in the ceremony, Cayou blessed each post of the plankhouse.



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Grand Ronde Canoe Family members put out giveaway items during the Tribal Plankhouse grand opening on Sunday, Sept. 19.**

He placed a candle by the south side center post that was to sit quietly, in the Indian Shaker tradition, protecting the building for exactly one year, when it is planned that it will "light up the house again."

"For a Tribe that at one time had just a name and a small cemetery, now along with everything else, this is one more thing bringing our culture back," said Tribal Council Vice Chair Reyn Leno.

"We see this thing that the children have been craving," said Mercier, who has had the lead in the building of the plankhouse and in the planning for the grand opening.

Even though Tribal adults have waited 44 years, in Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison's words, "for this day," Mercier noted, "Our children will never know there was a day when we didn't have a longhouse."

Tribal member Trey George, 16, is not too young to know, however. "Kids are going to be able to gift our Elders now," he said. "We get to bless our Elders because they've always blessed us."

"It's been a long time waiting," said Tribal Elder Regina Wheeler. "We were getting really anxious. I'm just glad that we do have a house now. It makes our home almost complete."

"There are not enough words, not enough thank yous in our hearts for all they've done," said Mercier of the Tribe's Elders. "We know all the work they have done in order for us to be standing here today."

After the Elders, thanks went to the many who helped build the plankhouse.

Thorsgard said that the Grand Ronde Tribe comes from many Tribes with "a lot of different ways of doing things."

The plankhouse honors all of those traditions, he said, with different parts of the building being built in different traditional ways.

"The roof," he said, "is more influenced by northern Oregon, but the sidewalls and the floor are more influenced by the southern Willamette Valley and Columbia River style homes."

Whatever the various cultural contributions, however, one fact overrides the rest, he said.

"Not since the early 1900s did we have a home for dance. This is a unique thing for us. We've seen it done elsewhere, but never here. This plankhouse will help us get reacquainted with the old ways."

The huge cedar posts anchoring the plankhouse were negotiated by and brought to the Tribe through the efforts of Don Day, Tribal Elder and Tribal Cultural Protection specialist, said Tribal member and Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis.

Mercier told stories of the building's history.

The posts came from the Willamette National Forest, he said, where a 1913 wildfire scarred the wood. The plankhouse poles came

later from thinnings carried out in the 1930s.

"These beautiful old growth cedar kept that story in the logs, and we left it (as a story) to be told."

Each post was hand-scraped, pressure washed and three times hand-washed, he said.

"There are many Tribal hands on these logs."

"Our ancestors are with us now," said Cayou, "smiling to see what you have done."

Makah artist John Goodwin (Indian name: Nytom) called Grand Ronde Tribal members "very hospitable people."

Grand Ronde's oldest Tribal Elder Nora Kimsey attended.

"This is the way it is supposed to be," said Kimsey's daughter, Margaret Provost. "I think it's awesome."

Tribal youth were out in force, dancing and singing as part of the ceremonies. Elders collected cattails and made grass skirts for the girls who danced.

"It makes you feel like a small thing, and part of something much bigger," said Tribal member David Harrelson.

"It's a real good thing to bring the family together," said Tribal member Joe Grammer.

Tribal member Arlettia Krehbiel, mother to Tribal members Brian Krehbiel and Bobby Mercier, came to see the family. "I love it," she said. "My grandkids are all in it!"

Arlettia's brother, Tribal Elder David Clark, came with his wife, Susan. "It's humbling, and makes me very proud," he said. "Bobby has been very special, a very strong person."

"The kids want to be right here," said Bobby Mercier, "where they know it is safe. They need a sense of belonging, of who they are, and this is where they learn it." ■

## ATTENTION TRIBAL MEMBERS

### COMMITTEE AND SPECIAL EVENT BOARD VACANCIES

The following Committees and Special Event Boards have vacant positions.

|                               |           |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Veterans' Special Event Board | 1 Vacancy |
| Powwow Special Event Board    | 1 Vacancy |
| Rodeo Special Event Board     | 1 Vacancy |
| Cultural Trust Board          | 1 Vacancy |
| Ceremonial Hunt Board         | 1 Vacancy |
| Social Services               | 2 Vacancy |

Please send completed applications to Dakota Whitecloud, Tribal Council Relations Coordinator, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, OR 97347.