

Membership briefed on new Web site, health survey

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Tribal members were briefed on a new Tribal Web site design set to debut Jan. 31 and were asked to fill out a health survey at the Jan. 9 General Council meeting held in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde.

Tribal member and Tribal Web Designer Willie Mercier discussed the new Web site design, which will eliminate the need for Tribal members to sign on to view a "Tribal members only" side.

The new Tribal Web site will be completely public, which will require less technical support and encourage a more transparent Tribal government, he said.

The new Tribal Web site, Mercier said, will place more Tribal news on the front page, offer Tribal Council members a place to write individual blogs, revamp the Tribal calendar and make it more prominent, and archive news stories and Tribal Council agendas.

The new Web site also will allow Smoke Signals to post more photos using a Flickr account.

"We tried to keep the design similar, but get more information to the membership," Mercier said.

Mercier said the changes have already started with Tribal videos now available for all to see.

Tribal member Andy Jenness asked if there are any plans to podcast Tribal Council Legislative Action Committee meetings. Mercier said it has not been discussed, but it would be relatively easy to accomplish if a decision was made to do it.

Tribal Council Secretary Kathleen Tom asked if there is some way for Tribal members to remotely participate in Tribal Council meetings by using Internet video services, such as Skype.

Tribal member and Tribal Audio-Visual Network Technician Wendell Olson said there are systems that could allow individual Tribal members to log in to a video conference, but then the Tribe would have to have a dedicated employee to moderate those Tribal members and their participation in Tribal Council meetings.

Olson added there are other expensive systems that would allow Tribal members to watch and participate in Tribal Council meetings by going to the Portland and Eugene satellite offices.

But, he added, the Tribe's Information Systems Department is currently trying simple and inexpensive tactics to disseminate information to the Tribal membership and will investigate other systems if demand outgrows those solutions.

After Mercier, Tribal Health Services Executive Director Mark Johnston explained the need for all Tribal members to complete the Alternate Resource Survey, which is designed to save Tribal dollars currently being spent on health care.

Johnston said approximately 1,000 of the 3,700 eligible Tribal members have completed the survey. To encourage the other Tribal members to fill out the survey, health care claims will be held beginning March 1 until an individual Tribal member has completed the survey.

Johnston said that the cost of the Tribal member health care plan, which consumes more than \$20 million of the annual Tribal budget, could be reduced if Tribal members with access to other health care, such as Medicare or a spouse's employer's health plan, used the other plan as the primary payer and the Tribal member health plan (Skookum) was secondary.

"It's important to get members on other plans if available," Johnston said. "We can save the Tribe millions this way."

In response to a question from Tribal member Virginia Roof, Johnston said Tribal members who have responded to the survey so far have expressed fear that they will lose their Skookum benefits. He added that will not occur; the plan is to have other insurance plans, if available, pay first and then Skookum will pay second.

Tribal member Bryan Mercier encouraged all Tribal members to fill out the survey, using his own experience as an example. Because



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Web Designer and Tribal member Willie Mercier gives a presentation on the new Tribal Web site design during the General Council meeting at the Tribal Community Center on Sunday, Jan. 9. The new site is scheduled to launch on Monday, Jan. 31.

already pre-paid for their health care with the land ceded to the federal government in the 1850s.

Johnston agreed, but said the \$1.6 million the federal government provides to the Tribe annually through Contract Health Services is woefully insufficient to meet Grand Ronde's need. The Tribe adds another \$20 million annually.

"It's not fair," Johnston said, "but is it where we are at. I am trying to come up with a plan that will not adversely affect you."

Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy and Tom also encouraged Tribal members to fill out the survey in an attempt to save gaming dollars that could be used for other purposes, such as per capita, education and economic development.

Johnston said Tribal members can fill out the survey by visiting the Tribal Web site or by calling Tribal Health Care Specialists Barbara Steere or Jim Holmes at 503-879-2487 or 503-879-2221. The survey also appeared in several *Smoke Signals* recently.

In other action, Tribal Chinuk wawa teacher Kathy Cole gave a brief update on the language program, adding that a Tribal dictionary will be published this year or in 2012.

Tribal Elders Gladys Hobbs, Julie Duncan and Duane Wheeler were elected to the Elders' Committee.

Tribal members Kathy Cole, Janet Billey and Kathleen Tom won the \$50 door prizes and J.J. Klinger won the \$100 door prize. Tom donated her door prize to the Elders' Committee.

The next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 6, in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde. ■

of a bad back, he has regular chiropractic visits and his Bonneville Power Administration insurance pays first and then Skookum picks up the rest, saving the Tribe thousands of dollars annually.

"Please fill out the survey," Mercier said. "It is in our common interest to do it."

Roof added that she was not happy about having to fill out the survey since Tribal members have

URGENT: Skookum Alternate Resource survey deadline

The Skookum Health Program is funded with Tribal dollars. The annual cost for medical claims has increased dramatically over the past 10 years, and in 2010 the Tribe spent more than \$20 million to operate the Skookum program. To help control costs, effective March 1, 2011, all members who have not completed the Skookum Alternate Resource Survey will not have their claims paid until the survey is completed. Shasta will be notifying members whose claims have been pended via mail, with instructions for completing the survey online or by telephone. Tribal staff will be contacting members who have not completed the survey by telephone as well.

This information is essential if we are going to get the plan back to its original intent of being the primary payer ONLY in cases when other payers (Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance) are not available.

PLEASE NOTE: TRIBAL COUNCIL WANTS YOU TO KNOW THAT THIS SURVEY IS CRITICAL AND THAT YOUR BENEFITS OR OUT-OF-POCKETS EXPENSES ARE NOT EXPECTED TO CHANGE.

Here is an example of how this will work and why it is so important:

- A Tribal member who has Skookum as a primary payer must have a back surgery and, due to complications, remains in the hospital for 45 days. Average cost to the Tribe: \$250,000.

- This same Tribal member has the same surgery and complications and remains in the hospital for 45 days. However, the member has access to his spouse's employer's insurance, with a maximum out of pocket of \$5,000. Total cost to the Tribe: no more than \$5,000.

YOU MAY COMPLETE THE SURVEY ONLINE (BY FOLLOWING THE LINK ON THE CTGR WEB SITE) OR OVER THE TELEPHONE BY CONTACTING BARBARA STEERE, JIM HOLMES OR MELODY BAKER AT (800) 775-0095. ■

Canoe carvers requested by Cultural Resources

The Cultural Resources Department would like to invite all who are interested to join us in carving the first river canoe to be made in Grand Ronde since the reservation was established. This canoe will be a great achievement for our Tribe and cultural identity. Tribes like the Kalapuyas, Umpquas and Rogue Rivers used this style of canoe. We want as many people who are interested and able to have a hand in carving this canoe. We are encouraging any help or support just by stopping by and witnessing the process and asking questions. The canoe will be moved to the Mission Mill Museum in April to be displayed in the Grand Ronde canoe exhibit.

We will be carving every other Tuesday and Thursday at 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. at the carving shed behind the recovery house.

Contact Brian Krehbiel for more information and scheduling at 503-879-4639. ■