

Membership receives update on economic development

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

New Tribal Economic Development Director Titu Asghar presented an overview of the Tribe's burgeoning economic development efforts at the Sunday, March 6, General Council meeting held in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde.

Asghar explained to Tribal members the foundation he has been establishing since joining the Tribe on Jan. 17.

After a brief explanation of his previous work history and education, Asghar launched into the philosophical underpinnings that Tribal economic development will need to have to become successful.

He said the Tribe must establish clear-cut goals and also decide on criteria with which to judge possible Tribal economic development. The Tribe needs to establish an investment vetting process that will help Tribal leaders make "thoughtful decisions" and have a disciplined investment approach, he added.

All of this, he said, will establish a Tribal investment policy statement.

Asghar briefly covered many of the decisions that must go into establishing a Tribal investment policy. For instance, does the Tribe want its economic development efforts to be complementary to its current business enterprises in gaming and timber or does the Tribe want to expand into other areas that are not correlated to its current business holdings? Does the Tribe want to invest seed capital in start-up companies without a history of success or does it instead want to invest in established companies with proven management in a competitive market position?

Asghar said the Tribe also must keep a global perspective when analyzing potential economic development opportunities since events in countries like Libya and Egypt can affect the local economy through higher gas prices.

"We need to take a holistic ap-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Titu Asghar, Tribal Economic Development director, responds to a question from Tribal member Michael Bolton during the General Council meeting held in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde on Sunday, March 6. Asghar gave a presentation on the Tribe's economic development efforts during the meeting.

proach and make educated guesses," Asghar said. "We need to hunt for the value in a bad economy and diversify to spread out the risks while still protecting our turf."

Asghar invoked well-known investor Warren Buffett, who said that in economic development and investing, "Tomorrow is always uncertain."

Asghar said he hopes to work with Tribal Finance to help diversify the Tribal stock portfolio so that not all stocks are in one particular sector of the economy.

"We need to divide the pie to meet your needs," he said.

Tribal member Michael Bolton said that he is concerned that increasing gas prices will cause another recession and that Tribal economic development efforts need to take that into consideration.

Tribal member Eric Bernando said he supports diversifying the Tribe's revenue stream beyond Spirit Mountain Casino, timber sales and state and federal funding.

Asghar said Tribal economic development should be about creating the opportunity to create jobs and

make money, but it also should be open to out-of-area investments that will make the Tribe money.

Other Tribal members endorsed a variety of economic diversification efforts, from buying real estate in a down market, funding biofuel efforts to decrease Tribal dependence on foreign oil, eco-tourism on the Reservation, starting ranching operations to provide meat to the casino and helping Tribal members start their own businesses.

"Are we going to create an economic development environment where Tribal members can start their own businesses or are we just going to make the Tribe more money?" asked Tribal member Bryan Mercier.

"A bit of both," Asghar said. "Job creation is a byproduct of economic development."

Tribal member and Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis also suggested investing in Tribal members who want to start their own businesses. "Are we going to be enriching the Tribe or investing in Tribal members so they can make a living as well?"

Tribal member and Eugene Office Coordinator Perri McDaniel suggested the Tribe concentrate on self-sufficiency and sustainability in its economic development efforts, noting that most investments are dependent on the oil industry. She said she supports ways for the Tribe to create its own energy, get off the grid and grow its own food.

McDaniel's comments inspired a discussion among Tribal members about what Tribal self-sufficiency means.

"To me, diversification of assets is the only way to become self-sufficient," Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker, who chaired the meeting, said. "They go hand in hand."

Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg said economic diversification should either create jobs or create businesses that bring money in to the Tribe.

Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. said that Tribal Council has to balance the need to help Tribal members who live locally with ensuring Tribal investments make money so that Tribal members who live outside of the area still receive per capita, health care and other Tribal benefits.

"Not all Tribal members live here," Giffen said. "It's a struggle to meet that mission statement."

Asghar concluded the 90-minute presentation by adding that he is proud to have joined the Tribe.

"We need to focus on what your needs are," he said. "I will be perfectly happy coming to you every day, defending why I did not lose your money."

Before Asghar's presentation, Tribal members Bobby Mercier and Brian Krehbiel performed a blessing song.

The next General Council meeting will be held Sunday, April 3, in Portland. The location has yet to be determined.

Tribal Elders Butch LaBonte and Steve Rife and Tribal member Gary Campbell won the \$50 door prizes and Tribal member Rhonda Leno won the \$100 door prize. ■

First Foods Celebration

Saturday, March 19, 2011
Starting at Noon
Community Center, Grand Ronde

Meal Service starts at Noon

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Eugene Tribal Wellness Program meets

The Eugene Tribal Wellness Program meets at 10 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday in the satellite office at 711 Country Club Road, Suite 1A. All fitness levels are welcome. The program covers strength, cardio and stretching, and discusses strategies for healthy living at home.

The program is free to Tribal members and their spouses.
For more information, contact 541-484-7085. ■

Land to be added to list for trust

RESERVATION
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on the west side of Grand Ronde Road.

"Even though this acquisition was primarily driven for land consolidation purposes, it will immediately generate additional income for the Tribe from the hay fields and home rental," he said.

In addition, Tribal representatives are surveying the properties to determine if there are any potential cultural assets located on them.

Reibach thanked numerous Tribal departments for assisting in the negotiations and purchase, including Finance, the Tribal Attorney's Office, Executive Office and Tribal Council.

"Congratulations to everyone for all the work in getting our lands back," he said.

Reibach said the properties would be placed on a list of Tribal lands that need to be taken into trust with an application to be filed within the next 12 to 24 months with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. ■