

Mid-Valley 211 expands to Polk, Marion counties

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

In these days of single-button phone numbers on cell phones, operator and 911 are about the only numbers people still remember.

Starting in September 2011, however, residents of Polk and Marion counties could add 211 to that short list.

These Mid-Valley 211 counties are among the latest included in a nationwide service, which now covers 83 percent of the country. The project started in Atlanta in 1997 to provide services in the wake of the Olympics held there in 1996.

In 2000, the Federal Communications Commission designated 211 as the dialing code for information and referral.

Here in the mid-Willamette Valley, Yamhill County rolled out as a test for rural areas in Oregon in 2009, according to John Olinger, manager of Mid-Valley 211 for the Mid-Willamette Valley United Way covering Yamhill, Marion and Polk counties.

The service is currently active in 19 Oregon counties. Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas and Clark (Washington state) counties received the service in 2004.

In Oregon and parts of south-

western Washington, United Way is a principle funder of this service that points people to health and social services available locally. Each state administers 211 programs independently.

The goal for Oregon, said Olinger, is for Mid-Valley 211 to be available statewide by the end of this year.

With more than 5,000 health and social service programs serving Oregon residents, Mid-Valley 211 also keeps track of who's got goods left and who is out of money for the month.

"It's fairly common for agencies to run out," said Olinger. "In Yamhill County, the Salvation Army was out of funds for the month of January on the first business day of January."

If an agency is out of funds for the month, he said, it is much better to temporarily take it out of the database.

The program also follows up with callers, Olinger said.

Community Information specialists aim to follow up on 2 percent to 3 percent of the calls to see how successful referrals have been.

Specialists go through an "intensive, several-week training program before they handle calls,"

said Communications Director Matt Kinshella.

Calls from across the state come to the Portland call center. It is set up with a phone bank for 10 to 15 Community Information specialists at a time, though about five were on the phone during a recent visit to the center.

About half of Oregon calls to 211 for utility and rental assistance, for example, are successful referrals, said Olinger, but about half lose out to "barriers" — including, for example, income or residence requirements — that keep funds from flowing.

The more rural the location, of course, the smaller the pool of resources that is available.

"One of the good things," Olinger said, "is that we are able to connect people to local, county or statewide sources."

"One of the challenges (in parts of the state) is that nobody knows about it," he added. Not many calls have come from Grand Ronde, he said.

Community member Christine Mercier, who works at the Grand Ronde Food Bank, had not heard of the service.

Dave Fullerton, manager of the Tribal Social Services Department, had heard of the service, but did not know of any Tribal members who have used it. An e-mail to all Tribal employees asking for people who had used the program found nobody who had.

Referral areas include, but are not limited to, health care, energy assistance, elder care, volunteer options, counseling and support,

employment resources, emergency food and shelter, and disability support and advocacy.

In fiscal year 2010-11, the Oregon service counted 260,000 "touches," meaning contacts by phone or Web visits. Since the state's latest counties opened for business last September, Marion and Polk have counted an average of 632 calls and 1,389 "touches" a month. The Oregon and southwest Washington Web site is www.211info.org.

The service targets people in need and those helping people in need, said Olinger.

"Since the recession," said Kinshella, "we're seeing a new kind of caller. There are many more with a multitude of needs."

Community Information specialists are trained to ask about secondary needs.

"Are there children in the house?" Mandy Kubisch, Community Information coordinator, asks a caller who had requested information about rental assistance. "Are you OK on food and other services?"

"One of the things we pride ourselves on," said Kubisch, "is we really listen to their situation."

The most common help requested, she said, is for energy, rental assistance and health care.

The service has Spanish speakers on staff and access to translators for virtually any language.

"It looks pretty good," said April Neill (Umpqua), secretary in the Planning and Grants Development Department. She had not heard of it, but after looking it up on the Web, she said, "It's a service that everybody is going to want." ■

Border Patrol slates recruitment event

The U.S. Border Patrol will conduct a Customs and Border Protection Recruiting Event from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 2, in the Tribal Education Building, 9615 Grand Ronde Road.

As agents for the U.S. Border Patrol, employees protect more than 8,000 miles of international boundaries. To be considered, applicants must be a U.S. citizen or resident for the past three years, be between 18 and 39 years of age and pass a background investigation.

For more information, contact Joshua Clift at 503-879-1635 or visit www.borderpatrol.gov on the Internet. ■



Basket weaving
with Connie Graves

Where: Elders' Activity Center
When: Every Tuesday
Time: 12:30 P.M.

We will be having a basket weaving class every Tuesday that is open to the public. If you have any questions, contact Brian Krehbiel at 503-879-4639

Ad created by George Valdez

17 Tribal members ran for office in 2011

PRIMARY continued
from front page

percent of the total vote.

In 2011, 17 Tribal members ran and Tribal Vice Chair Reyn Leno, who received the most votes, received 12.64 percent of the vote.

In 2010, 14 Tribal members ran for Tribal Council and incumbent Chris Mercier, who led the field, received 17.54 percent of the vote.

In 2009, 18 Tribal members ran for Tribal Council and newcomer Toby McClary, who led the field, received 11.59 percent of the vote.

In 2008, 13 Tribal members ran for Tribal Council and the top vote-getter, incumbent Kathleen Tom, received 14.52 percent of the vote.

Tribal Council did not act on the term limit idea, which was endorsed by 75.5 percent (701-227) of those responding to the September 2010 survey. Almost 61 percent of those responding said they favor two terms as the limit for Tribal Council service while a combined 93 percent of respondents said that a maximum of three terms or less should be the limit.

At the Jan. 4 Tribal Council meeting, McClary said there were many

issues regarding term limits, such as whether the limit should apply to consecutive or total terms, that has prevented Tribal Council from agreeing on a proposal to send to the membership for a vote.

"The term limits question was very complex," McClary said. "I think there were three different options that people could pick from as far as how many terms. There was not just do you support term limits, but what is your preference? ... When we began discussing that, the complexity of the subject is what really dragged out the length of time it took for us to move on anything."

McClary said Tribal Council then decided to move forward on only the primary election amendment.

"We will revisit that," McClary said. "We went with what was easy first, and we will continue to tackle the term limits issue."

At the Jan. 25 Tribal Council meeting, McClary said he decided to vote against sending the primary election proposal to Tribal voters because he thought Tribal Council should have moved forward with resolutions on both the primary election and term limits to save money. ■