

Tribal Council amends its operating rules

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

In reaction to Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker's arrest for alleged possession of meth, the Grand Ronde Tribal Council voted 7-0 on Wednesday, May 2, to amend its operating procedures to reinforce a zero-tolerance policy regarding illegal drug use in the community.

The new operating procedures state that any Tribal Council member arrested for felony possession of a controlled substance during their term in office will no longer be paid. In addition, an accused Tribal Council member will no longer have use of a Tribal credit card and will be stripped of his or her appointments to boards, associations and/or commissions.

The new rules apply to any incidents before and after adoption of the new operating procedures resolution for current Tribal Council members.

However, an accused Tribal Council member will remain on Tribal Council. Only Tribal voters can remove a Tribal Council member from office through recall.

Sheker did not attend the May 2 meeting, out on personal leave, Tribal Council Secretary Jack Giffen Jr. said. Her absence was not excused by Tribal Council.

The new operating procedures reflect Tribal Council's commitment to maintaining a drug-free workplace and community. Tribal Attorney Rob Greene said at the May 1 Legislative Action Committee meeting.

Sheker, who is in the final year of a third three-year term on Tribal Council, was arrested April 24 after an altercation with her daughter-in-law in Tribal housing.



Valorie Sheker

According to a probable cause affidavit written by Polk County Deputy Jeff Williams, who was the arresting officer, a small plastic container found in Sheker's purse contained methamphetamine and she admitted to snorting the illegal substance three days earlier. Unlawful possession of a controlled substance is a felony in Oregon.

Sheker also was arrested on felony assault and misdemeanor harassment charges. She pleaded not guilty to the charges on Tuesday, May 8, in Polk County Circuit Court. Her trial is tentatively scheduled for June 27.

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said the new Tribal Council operating procedures will retroactively apply to Sheker's situation.

Sheker will no longer be paid if she decides to remain on Tribal Council and she will not be able to use a Tribal credit card or represent the Tribe on outside boards, commissions and associations.

Greene said that should charges not be filed, if the charges are eventually dropped or if the accused Tribal Council member is found innocent, pay, use of a Tribal credit card and the ability to serve on boards, commissions and associations will be reinstated, according to the amended operating procedures.

Later in the May 2 meeting, Tribal Council appointed Toby McClary to fill Sheker's spot on the Chemawa Station LLC board of directors.

The week following Sheker's arrest has been a "very sad" time for the Tribe and Tribal Council, Kennedy said.

"I know and understand that people have problems," Kennedy said. "I believe that every one of us has family members, or even ourselves, who may have gone through situations like this. The action that we took was really to make sure that the representation that sits at this table is doing so in a responsible way and we believe that you, as the members, want us to act accordingly."

"I just want the members to know that this is not a personal agenda, and she certainly has my best wishes that she would seek a better place in her life and that things will take a different path for her."

During the Tribal Council meeting, it was revealed that Tribal Council invited Sheker to come in and talk. She did not attend.

Tribal Council also requested in writing that Sheker resign and seek the help provided Tribal members combating substance abuse.

Tribal member Brenda Gray said Tribal Council should also address driving under the influence and misdemeanor drug charges, such as marijuana possession, in their new operating procedures resolution.

Vice Chair Reyn Leno said Tribal Council is addressing the current issue and that Tribal voters have a bigger say through amending the Tribal Constitution.

"I don't appreciate people being potentially on drugs or hung-over or anything else trying to make decisions for this council," Leno said.

Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom endorsed a stronger ethics ordinance that addresses alcohol and drug use by Tribal Council members.

Giffen said the Tribal Constitution should be amended so that if a Tribal Council member is arrested for felony drug possession, there is the ability to automatically remove the person from office.

"It needs to be in the Constitution to have teeth," Giffen said.

Tribal Council member Chris Mercier said he was concerned about creating Tribal law on the spot to deal with the Sheker incident.

"I really hope that we don't do something like this again," Mercier said. "We're making up Tribal law to deal with something that just happened very, very recently and that's a dangerous precedent to set."

"I think everybody up here wants to see Val get healthy and be healthy," McClary said. "We really all do wish the best for Councilwoman Sheker and that she gets the help that she needs."

Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. said that the situation shows what can happen when you take the wrong path.

"You have to be very careful about the decisions that you make in your life," Bobb said. "That is one of the things we always try to preach to our younger people, to not go down these paths because it's a pretty dark, lonely street, and it just gives you an idea that it can happen to anybody. ... It ruins multiples lives when you do that."

Tribal Council member June Sherer said she continues to support Tribal Council members having to take a monthly urinalysis test.

Had that policy been in place, Sherer said, it would have saved a big headache and, perhaps, gotten Sheker the help she needs.

"We need to nip this in the bud while we're ahead of it," Sherer said. ■

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Elder's bingo held on Saturdays

Bingo at the Elders' Activity Center will be held from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 26.

For more information, contact Elder Activity Assistant Daniel Ham at 503-879-2233. ■

Graves teaching basket weaving

Tribal Elder Connie Graves teaches a basket weaving class, which is open to the public, at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday in the Elders' Activity Center.

For more information, contact Tribal Cultural Education Specialist Brian Krehbiel at 503-879-4639 or brian.krehbiel@grandronde.org. ■

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