

General Council concentrates on casino issues

Current operations, future threats dominate September meeting

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Spirit Mountain Casino's current operations and looming threats to its revenue dominated the Sept. 9 General Council meeting held in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde.

Spirit Mountain Casino General Manager Randy Dugger said that the management structure has changed since the recent resignation of Chief Executive Officer Rodney Ferguson.

Dugger said the previous structure of having a chief executive officer, chief operating officer and chief financial officer has been replaced with a general manager structure.

Dugger was accompanied by his executive team of Facilities Director Ron Reibach, Human Resources Director Laurie South, Security Director Joann Mercier, Gaming Director Stan Dillon, Guest Services Director Janet Shultz, Finance Director Jamie Tharp and Surveillance Director Steve Bobb Jr.

Dugger said that 2012 revenue has been "flat," as predicted by Ferguson in his report to the membership in September 2011.

"It certainly turned out to be that way, although it has not been consistent from month to month. ... We are down year over year, the bulk of that coming essentially in two months, January and July," Dugger said, citing gasoline prices that reached the \$4-a-gallon range in the spring because of a refinery fire in Washington state as one of the major causes.

Gas prices briefly plummeted this summer and then skyrocketed again when a refinery fire in Cali-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Spirit Mountain Casino General Manager Randy Dugger gives the Tribal membership an update on the casino during the General Council meeting at the Tribal Community Center on Sunday, Sept. 9.

fornia once again stressed the supply of gasoline on the West Coast.

"Gas prices generally impact our visits from what we call the 50- to 75-mile range; the Portland and Vancouver area. In April, we saw a significant reduction in the number of trips coming from that area," he said. "The good news is, such as it was in April, people were still coming, a little bit less often but spending a little bit more, which tells me they still had money to spend, but they choose to use their gas money wisely."

Dugger said 2013 is looking a lot like 2012.

"There is nobody out there projecting a significant uptick in economic activity between now and then," he said.

To combat the still sluggish Oregon economy, he said that keeping casino expenses in check in 2013 will be a high priority.

"I think we have done a good job of keeping our expenses in check," Dugger said. "That doesn't mean we can't do a better job and certainly

one of my goals for 2013 is to make a significant improvement at that level."

Dugger said the casino is remaining abreast of developments on the Internet gaming front. Casino staff members are investigating establishment of a free play Internet site that would set the stage for Internet gaming should it ever be approved by Congress.

"We are at the forefront of Tribal gaming in where we are in trying to understand the potential for this," Dugger said.

Dugger said a survey found that Internet gaming has the potential to increase the number of visits to a brick-and-mortar casino.

In addition, the casino continues to update and upgrade its slot machines, adding new games and upgrading games to be more relevant and current.

"New games are good for the business is all I can say," Dugger said. "They generate a lot of activity."

In response to a question, Dugger said that slots account for a

majority of casino revenue, which only accentuates the importance of keeping them current.

Dugger fielded several questions from Tribal members, who complained about a perceived decrease in customer service at Spirit Mountain Casino.

"There is no excuse for poor service, no excuse for being rude and no excuse of lauding your perceived positional power over somebody," Dugger said, pledging to investigate claims of poor service when they are brought to his attention. "This is a high priority for me."

In executive session, Tribal lobbyist Justin Martin briefed the membership on the Tribe's plans to combat measures 82 and 83 on the Nov. 6 ballot. The two measures would amend the Oregon Constitution to permit private casinos and specifically OK a private casino being built in Wood Village at the former greyhound race track.

A private casino located in the Portland metropolitan area would negatively affect revenue at Spirit Mountain Casino, the Tribe's primary economic enterprise that funds Tribal programs, such as health care, education and Elder pensions.

Because Martin's briefing occurred in executive session, *Smoke Signals* cannot report on the details.

Martin's briefing lasted 70 minutes and he fielded about 15 questions and comments from Tribal members regarding the measures and the Tribe's planned reaction to a marketing blitz currently occurring in support of "The Grange."

Rex Haller, Daphne Colton and Tribal Elder Claudia Leno won the \$50 door prizes and JoAnna Briscoe won the \$100 door prize.

The next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 7, in Portland at a site yet to be determined. ■

Committee & Special Event Board meeting days and times

Below is the most current information on the meeting days and times for Tribal Committees and Special Event Boards:

- **Ceremonial Hunt Board** meets as needed. Chair: Shonn Leno.
- **Cultural Trust Board** meets at 4 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month in Modular No. 2. Chair: Perri McDaniel.
- **Culture Committee** meets at 1 p.m. the first Wednesday of the month in Modular No. 3. Chair: TBD.
- **Education Committee** meets at 5:15 p.m. on the first Monday of the month in the Adult Education Building. Chair: TBD.
- **Elders' Committee** meets at 10 a.m. the third Wednesday of the month in the Elders' Activity Center. Chair: Gladys Hobbs.
- **Enrollment Committee** meets quarterly in Room 204 of the Governance Building. Acting Chair: Robert Schmid.
- **Fish & Wildlife Committee** meets at 5:30 p.m. the second Tuesday of the month at the Natural Resources Building. Chair: Harold Lyon.
- **Health Committee** meets at 10 a.m. the second Wednesday of the month in the Tribal Wellness Center. Acting Chair: Patti Tom-Martin.
- **Powwow Special Event Board** meets at 5 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at the Tribal Community Center. Chair: Dana Ainam.
- **Rodeo Special Event Board** meets at 6 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at the Tribal Rodeo Office. Chair: Harold Lyon.
- **Social Services Committee** meets at 4 p.m. the second Monday of the month in the Social Services Conference Room. Chair: Jenny Sanchez.
- **Timber Committee** meets at 5 p.m. the second Thursday of the month at the Natural Resources Building. Chair: Bob Mercier.
- **Veterans Special Event Board** meets at 4 p.m. the first and third Tuesday of the month in the Tribal Community Center. Chair: Gene LaBonte.

Back-to-School powwow set for Sept. 21

A Back-to-School Children's InterTribal Powwow will be held from 5 to 9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 21, in the Tribal gym.

People are invited to participate in a night of dancing, singing and drumming. For more information, contact Halona Butler at Halona.butler@grandronde.org. ■

Committee seeks Elders' phone numbers

The Tribal Elders Committee is working on a volunteer phone list of Elders. If you would like to submit your phone number and address to be available to other Elders, send it to elders.committee@grandronde.org or leave a message at 503-879-2231. ■

ATTENTION TRIBAL MEMBERS

COMMITTEE AND SPECIAL EVENT BOARD VACANCIES

The following Committees and Special Event Boards have vacant positions.

Social Services	3 Vacancies
Rodeo Special Event Board	1 Vacancy
Veterans Special Event Board	1 Vacancy

Please send completed applications to the Lauri Smith, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, OR 97347.