

Eugene satellite office re-opens

Former Tribal Council member Andy Jenness heads effort to build community in area

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Named as temporary Eugene area satellite office coordinator on Sept. 17., former Tribal Council member Andy Jenness has started the effort to create community among the more than 200 area members of the Grand Ronde Tribe.

Before the year is out, Tribal Council is likely to wrestle again with the future of the office. At the end of June, Tribal Council split 4-4 over how to continue to serve the Eugene-area membership.

The first choice was to maintain an office and "refocus" by hiring a local member of the Tribe to build community.

"I voted for option A," said Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. "That was to me the only way it was going to get a real shot at working. We need to watch the budget and keep good track of who is attending the classes. Even if nonTribal members are attending classes, that's fine as long as funding is not coming out of Tribal funds.

"I have a strong feeling that now, with Andy Jenness at the watch, we'll be able to heal some of the bad feelings in the Eugene area. For me, we have to remember at the end of the day we are talking about people. My stand will be to always do everything that we can do to keep the office going."

Bobb was joined by Tribal Council members Cheryle A. Kennedy, Kathleen Tom and Chris Mercier in supporting continued funding for the office.

The second choice was to focus on keeping popular programs in the area, but closing the office.

"My position," said Tribal Council Secretary Toby McClary, "was to close the office while still maintaining the cultural, language and fitness class contracts. These are programs that the Eugene Tribal membership has proven to be important to them. I felt we could inflate the contracts to provide for a rental allowance that would in turn save Tribal dollars that are being spent on monthly lease payments. In my opinion there were not enough Tribal members utilizing the Eugene area office routinely to justify the dollars being spent.

"With all of that said, I am happy to see Tribal member and Eugene resident Andy Jenness coordinating the day-to-day operations there. He is well-respected in the area and I hope he is successful in bringing the membership together."

McClary was joined by Tribal Council Chair Reyn Leno, Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr. and Tribal Council member June Sherer in voting to fund only the programs.

Newly elected Tribal Council member Jon A. George may cast the deciding vote when the question comes up again, but he hasn't yet indicated how he'll vote.

"We haven't really had a manager down here since last year at this time," said Jenness from a small, temporary office at 221 W. 10th Ave. in Eugene, at the corner of 10th and Charnelton,



Andy Jenness

People from the Tribe's temporary office pool, including Amber Castle, have kept the office open on and off since then. Barbara Mercier, executive assistant in the Tribe's Executive Office, has filled in to keep the satellite office open for culture, beading and regalia classes, but, says Jenness, "the office has been in limbo."

Given budget considerations, he adds, "It is questionable whether funding for the office will be in next year's budget."

Still, Jenness is moving forward with his plans. He found federal funding to bring Kevin Simmons on as a Work Experience employee, and the two of them will continue to look for funding beyond Tribal coffers to keep paying staff and find a larger, more suitable office for Eugene area members of the Tribe.

"We are trying to build a Tribal community and gathering place where Grand Ronde Tribal people can connect with one another and access available services," said Simmons in an e-mail. "Many of the Grand Ronde families in the Eugene area have been away from the Reservation for years. In fact, many of the families have learned to survive and succeed without the many insulating comforts that Tribal and/or Indian life provides on a daily basis."

"Kevin has done some grant writing," said Jenness. "We're going to put our heads together to look for new resources. Hopefully, we'll find a model that might work from what other Tribes with satellite offices have done."

"Eugene is a unique area," Simmons added. "There are many people who are sympathetic to the life and history of the Grand Ronde (and American Indian) experience. Yet, Indian people and families can feel very isolated many times because the greater Native community in Eugene is found in pockets and decentralized."

On Wednesday, Oct. 3, Jenness and Simmons held a potluck "to try to kick things off and let everyone know what our hours will be." Thirty-one attended, Jenness reported by e-mail, encouraged by the number.

At the moment, the office is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and Jenness uses flex time to keep the office open for evening events and classes.

Since reopening the office, Jenness said, he's seen a scattering of Tribal members visiting and looking for information about continuing events and classes.

"One of my passions," he said, "is to build a Tribal community. My goal is to have a Tribal community

and build that community for sharing. One of the things that happened last year, my two oldest daughters — Jessica Wolpe and Kayla Gottfried — made friends with Becky Weston and some of the other Parazoos of their age, and they've continued this friendship on a regular basis. The families get together for game nights and that never would have taken place without the Eugene office being open. I'd like to see that continue to happen."

The Tribe has 140 to 150 Tribal members in Eugene and Springfield proper, and if you include the outlying communities, Jenness said, there are probably close to 200 or more Tribal members who could make use of a Eugene office.

A Planning & Grants Department breakdown of Tribal membership in Oregon says there are 200 Tribal members in Lane County, 114 in Linn County and 18 in Benton County.

"When you live out away from the Tribe, you might not know if your neighbor is a Tribal member or not unless it comes up in conversation," Jenness said.

"I want to create an environment where people feel like they're part of something, where they belong and are part of a Tribal community."

"I want to work with our youth in the Eugene area," said Simmons. "It is important for all Grand Ronde youth, especially those in communities outside Grand Ronde, to know, understand and feel connected to our history, culture and language.

"Research in youth development shows that learning about history, culture and language helps the youth understand a better sense of self and family; and also helps with things like low self-esteem, substance abuse, suicide and educational success. But learning these things also builds our Grand Ronde Indian community and government for the future."

Jenness remembers asking Tribal Elder Margaret Provost what it means to be Tribal, what culture is about.

"She said, 'It's not about beads and moccasins. It's about belonging to something, about family.' And it hit me that she was absolutely so right. Those are the things that are truly important. Those are the things we need to be encouraging, that sense of belonging."

Jenness earned his master's in Business Administration and master's degree in journalism with a focus on public relations from the University of Oregon in 2011. Simmons earned his master's degree in Special Education, also from the University of Oregon, in 2012. ■

Conferated Tribes of Grand Ronde Youth Education Program



Halloween Party & Costume Contest

Monday, October 29th

The Conferated Tribes of Grand Ronde will be having a Halloween Party and Costume Contest on Monday, October 29th, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in Willamina. There will be prizes, music, and a costume contest. All are welcome to attend.

For more information contact Jillany McFarlane at 503-579-2311.

Veterans' committee seeking donations

The Tribe's Veterans' Special Event Board is looking for quality items for an Fallen Warriors dinner and silent auction to be held 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 30, at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in Willamina.

Donations can be dropped off at the Elders' Activity Center, specified as a donation for the Veterans' board or Fallen Warriors dinner. ■