

# Dugger takes over at Spirit Mountain Casino

*New general manager-style of management ushered in*

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

Almost three years after returning to Spirit Mountain Casino as its chief operations officer, Randy Dugger was appointed general manager of the Tribe's main business enterprise in August.

Dugger succeeds Rodney Ferguson, who worked for the casino for almost four years as its chief executive officer before resigning.

"I believe that the title 'general manager' suggests a more hands-on style than the CEO title, which suggests a more formal 'corporate' style," Dugger says about the change in management style at the casino.

"Spirit Mountain is a large business ... in fact the largest in Polk County. We are a Tribal business enterprise so we retain some of the characteristics of a small business in the sense that we are very connected to the communities in the area where we operate and where our Tribal members and employees live and raise their families.

"In my mind, the general manager title is a better fit to our business model. It suggests not only a more hands-on approach, but a more collaborative, involved and engaging style."

Dugger, 63, started working for Spirit Mountain Casino three months before it opened in October 1995. He started as the Food and Beverage manager and supervised the department's rapid growth from 1995 to 1999.

He was promoted to director of Guest Services, overseeing the casino's Facilities/Maintenance Department and Spirit Mountain Lodge. In 2004, he served as interim Gaming Director.

From 2007 to 2009, Dugger worked for the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians in California and returned in October 2009 to Spirit Mountain Casino as chief operations officer, the position he held until being appointed general manager.

"In every position I've held, I've had the opportunity to work with some great people who helped me learn and grow," he says. "The Tribe also has been very supportive in helping me with specific post-graduate studies in the gaming and nongaming areas to supplement my work experiences."

Dugger says that a change in title atop the casino's organizational chart does not necessarily mean a new style in leadership.

"In truth," he says, "it's not the job title ... it's the person in the job. When I'm out on the casino floor,



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Longtime employee Randy Dugger was appointed general manager of Spirit Mountain Casino in August.

## Tribal government opts for general manager style of operations, too

Tribal Chairman Reyn Leno announced on Thursday, Oct. 11, that the Tribal government also is adopting a general manager structure, eliminating the titles of executive officer and director of Development and director of Operations in the Executive Office.

"The primary objective of this re-organization is to provide a more effective means of achieving the Tribe's strategic goals," Leno said in an e-mail sent to Tribal staff.

Mark Johnston, who has been the Tribe's Health Services executive director for more than five years, was named Interim General Manager and Chris Leno accepted the post of Assistant General Manager.

"Chris Leno has served the Tribe well in the Executive Officer position and we are grateful to him for agreeing to stay on with our management team," Johnston said. "The Tribal organization and Tribal Council wants to commend Chris for his efforts on behalf of the Tribe and thank him for sharing our vision for reorganizing our management structure."

Under the new structure, Tribal department heads will report directly to the general manager.

Chairman Reyn Leno said the Tribe will post the general manager's position while Tribal Council works with Human Resources on an appropriate job description. ■

answering questions, giving directions, pushing in chairs and picking up trash, our guests have no idea what my job title is and they could care less. If they want something to drink, they see that I have a badge, assume I work here and ask me if I can get them a cup of coffee or a cold drink."

Dugger recalls a recent Monday when an elderly woman asked him for directions to the Cedar Plank Buffet.

"I was headed that way so I offered to walk her there," he says. "Along the way, she asked me all kinds of questions. When we arrived at the buffet, she asked my name and what I did. I told her that I was the general manager. She smiled at me and said, 'That sounds like fun' and she thanked me for walking her to the buffet."

"I see our employees do these

same things every day and, frankly, some of them are better at it than I am. Hopefully, I can continue to support them and they can continue to do the great work they do and together we can make this a better place to work and a better business."

Dugger says he has short- and long-term goals to accomplish as general manager. Immediately, he says, his main goal is helping to defeat Measures 82 and 83 on the Nov. 6 ballot. The two complementary measures would amend the state Constitution to allow privately run casinos and also specifically permit one in the Portland suburb of Wood Village.

"These measures don't just threaten to impact our revenues, they threaten local jobs with great benefits," Dugger says. "The impact extends to many local businesses that depend on our employees for their livelihoods and those that provide goods and services to the casino."

"The casino is the primary source of revenue for the Tribe, so my top priorities are to sustain and enhance those revenues. We also have a number of initiatives under way to improve how we operate our business. We are focused on the work environment, enhancing the

guest experience and finding more ways to attract people to come and visit us."

Dugger cites the casino's remodeled foot outlets and improved menus as one way Spirit Mountain is working to keep guest coming through the doors. In addition, the casino is using more locally grown foods according to the season as part of its "Local and Fresh" initiative.

The casino also has added new slot machines and improved technology to streamline day-to-day things like picking up drawing tickets. Electronic kiosks have been added to make it easier to participate in casino promotions and events, as well as eliminate lines.

Dugger says the casino is revamping its entertainment mix to book different types of entertainment.

"We will continue to bring in name entertainment, but we will mix it up with unique acts that you might not find outside of Las Vegas or Atlantic City," he says. "Our goal is to have quality, but affordable entertainment. We are also developing other large-scale events for next year."

As the national and state economies continue their sluggish, but consistent recovery from the economic recession of 2008, Dugger says the casino will continue to control its expenses and keep its margins "in order."

"Business has been up and down, but we are holding our own," he says. "What happens and where we go in 2013 depends on how well we can continue to manage our business and what happens with the economy."

"We are not forecasting a big improvement in the local or state economy in 2013, but hopeful that following the elections in November that things will begin to improve. There are so many things we can't control so we continue to work on the things we can."

He says the casino is working to attract more trade shows, convention-type activities and, during the summer, more outdoor events that will include well-known celebrities making guest appearances. Acts already booked in 2013 include comedian Bob Newhart, rock bands Air Supply and America and an "America's Got Talent" traveling show.

Dugger was born in raised in Washington state and moved to Oregon to work at Spirit Mountain. His father's family is originally from Oregon. His grandfather was born and raised in the Sandy/Boring area while his mother's family is Grand Ronde for as far back as the Tribe has records.

"I think the best answer to how a general manager style of management works is to say it's about being present, listening, being open-minded and collaborative, supportive and encouraging and understanding," Dugger says. "How well it works is a question that the staff can answer. I've been in the position for about 10 weeks. Hopefully over the next 10 months I can back up my statement with some results." ■

## Event to celebrate cancer survivors

A Cancer Survivor Celebration and Cancer Awareness luncheon will be held at 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 14, in the Elders' Activity Center. The free event will include lunch, prizes, guest speaker from the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure organization, informational materials and recognition of cancer survivors.

RSVP to [candi.buswell@grandronde.org](mailto:candi.buswell@grandronde.org) if you plan on attending to ensure adequate seating and food. ■