

Tribe gives thanks for Restoration

29 years marked during Nov. 18 events at plankhouse, gym

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Thanksgiving Day on Nov. 22 this year marked the official 29th anniversary of the federal government restoring recognition of the Grand Ronde Tribe, giving the hope of renewal to 850 Tribal members recorded on the Grand Ronde Termination rolls and for their heirs going forward.

This year's celebration of that day came four days early on Sunday, Nov. 18.

Events started at Achfa-Hammi, the plankhouse, "a home built of cedar planks," at 10 a.m. Tribal Culture & Language Specialist Bobby Mercier led a 25-member group from the Grand Ronde Canoe Family, who sang and drummed for another 75 attendees who were bunched and scattered throughout the holy building.

"I could feel what a spiritual place it was," said Kathy Cole, Tribal Cultural Resources manager.

"I could feel the ancestors there," said Mariann Mell, wife of Tribal GIS Coordinator Volker Mell.

The mixture of drums and voices gave goosebumps to Willi Becker, father of Tribal forestry intern Felix Becker. Willi and his wife, Beate, had included the Restoration celebration in their first visit to the American West. Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. and his wife, Connie, have been hosting Felix during his internship and hosted Felix's parents during their visit from Germany.

"I didn't understand all of it," said Beate, with her son translating, "but I felt the respect for (Tribal) ancestors in the building. It's important to have respect for Elders and to pass that on to the children."

The smoke from two fires inside the plankhouse also was passed on to the children. At one moment before the start of the plankhouse ceremony, a group of Grand Ronde Royalty poked their faces out of the building's round opening. "I can breathe again," one said.

Even with fans blowing upward at the front and back of the plank-



Tribal Elder Jolanda Catabay sings the national anthem at the beginning of the 29th Restoration Celebration Powwow at the Tribal gym on Sunday, Nov. 18.

house, smoke in the building was thick enough that Mercier told the group as it headed out to lunch at the gym, "You guys going there smelling like smoked fish, don't let anyone tell you you didn't bring anything."

Smoke or not, the hearts of Grand Ronde Tribal members were filled with thanksgiving.

"This is a good way to start out the day," said Bobby Mercier, "with song and a prayer for our ancestors, who are the reason why we are here today. Think of those in our nursing home who would like to be here. It's not always about us. There's always work for others that needs to be done."

The Canoe Family sang in welcome for those who walked 1856's Trail of Tears, for veterans, for change and for the Thunderbird, a sacred animal whose wings make the "cracks of thunder."

Mercier compared the planning and building of the plankhouse with the work it takes to bring a people back from Termination.

"We wanted a good foundation, just like we want to give our people," he said.

Just before noon, celebration ac-

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tivities moved to the Tribal gym. A shuttle transported people from the plankhouse to the Tribal gym for the afternoon and evening events.

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno said Restoration was about "a mistake of the U.S. government, and making them acknowledge and correct their mistake. We need to be proud of being Grand Ronde, even though our blood lines may be thin."

Of the original 850 members on the Termination roll, Leno said that only 375 are left.

Tribal Council member Jon A. George served as master of ceremonies for the third year. He presided over the afternoon's activities.

The noon meal included salmon, elk stew, salad, vegetables, fry bread and pie for dessert prepared by the Health and Wellness staff under the culinary guidance of Tribal Food Services Coordinator Kristy DeLoe.

Carolyn Long, interim vice chancellor for Academic Affairs at Washington State University,

Vancouver, called the plankhouse ceremony "fabulous."

"It's great to see all that positive energy, especially among children, and it's nice to see generations represented," Long said.

Like the University of Oregon, Oregon State, Portland State and Willamette University, Washington State is making connections among Tribal peoples, Long said, both to ensure Tribal people have opportunities, but in Washington State's case because the school's hospital-ity programs can be a good fit with many Tribal casino operations.

Dr. Twyla Burns, Washington state Educational Service District superintendent for District 112, said she "especially enjoyed the drumming and dancing." It reminded her of her acquaintance with Tribes in Alaska - Tlingit and Haida - from her time there.

"I'm happy to be here with these generous people," said Educational Service District 112 board member Trish Kellog.

St. Helens Mayor Randy Peterson presented Leno with a belated key to the city. He had initially intended to present it to the Tribe during the Maritime Heritage Festival held in mid-July when Tribal Council member Cheryl A. Kennedy was chairwoman, but the Mayor's Office had run out of keys at the time. St. Helens City Councilor Susan Conn also attended.

"I think it will open a lot of doors," said Leno in accepting the newly minted symbol of friendship.

Richard Bubba Sohapp and Chuckie Fryberg traveled from Washington state to drum for the Grand Ronde Tribe at the plankhouse and the gym during the day. Sohapp also came to share the Thanksgiving holiday with his family.

Tribal 477 Employment & Training and Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor Leslie Riggs attended with his wife, Heather, their new boy, Rhys, and older daughter, Ashtyn.

Elder Una Birchum and

her son, Lonnie Martinson, celebrated seven years since reuniting to Grand Ronde.

Grand Ronde and Veterans Royalty performed "The Lord's Prayer" and the Grand Ronde Canoe Family performed canoe dances.

Tribal Lands Manager and Native American Music Award-winning musician Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach, back from a recent trip to Northern Ireland, compared the worldwide interest in his music with the Grand Ronde Tribe.

"This is the greatest honor of my life," he said, "to be part of this Tribe."

He played "Forgiveness," a piece he wrote for his last album, "Wind Dreamer," on his flute with his own guitar work pre-recorded.

Raffle prizes were given away all afternoon. Intern Felix Becker won a 65-inch television only five weeks before he is scheduled to head back to Germany. Michael Mercier and Isaiah Fisher won a girl's and a boy's bike, respectively.

Elders Buddy White, Oscar Norwest, Leona Jeffers, Jimmy Shaw, Leo and Evelyn Seidel, along with Brenda Tuomi, Jammie Iverson, Tim Trempi, Petite family creations, Heather and Kristina Dreamers Crafts, Michael and Faith Bolton, and Frank and Laurie Hostler donated raffle items.

The Restoration Powwow started at 4 p.m. in the gym.

The Grand Ronde Color Guard, led by Elder Wayne Chulik with the Eagle staff and Marcus Gibbons carrying the staff of his uncle, Marce Norwest, posted the

colors. Norwest walked on in 2011.

"It's an honor," said Gibbons. "He was such a vital part of the community. We dance his spirit into the ceremony every time we dance in with his staff."

Sharon Norwest, Marce's widow, donated the staff to Tribal Council just before this year's Restoration celebration, said Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr., who accepted the staff on behalf of council.

"She wanted it to be used during powwows," Bobb said. "We're going to try to make that happen."

Tribal Elder Gene LaBonte carried the Grand Ronde flag, Michelle Cooper carried the U.S. flag, Tribal Elder Wink Soderberg carried the Oregon flag and Bob Duncan carried the MIA/POW flag.

Jolanda Catabay sang the national anthem.

Washie Squetimkin and Halona Butler, who sponsor children's powwows throughout the year, brought along their young dancers for the powwow.

Nick Sixkiller was the powwow master of ceremonies and Deitrich Peters served as Arena Director. Host drums included Johanaaiee, Geary Villa, West Coast Boyz, The Woodsmen, Autumn Wind and All Nations.

Reagan's signature occurred after almost a decade of Grand Ronde Tribal members working

to restore the Tribe. Tribal Elders Margaret Provost, Marvin Kimsey and the late Merle Holmes are credited with getting the effort started, but contributions from many Tribal members aided in the eventual restoration of the Tribe.

Elder Kathryn Harrison, who testified before Congress in 1983 in support of Tribal Restoration, gave the invocation at the Plankhouse, while Elder and Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. and Bobby Mercier provided invocations during the afternoon activities at the gym.

The day's events were streamed on the Tribal Web site and Eugene Tribal Services Representative Andy Jenness punctuated his Facebook page all afternoon with captioned photos. Tribal photographer Michelle Alaimo also posted a photo gallery on the Tribe's official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/#!/CTGRgov.

Nov. 22 has been called by Bobb "the most important day in Grand Ronde Tribal history."

"Restoration," George said, "is all about who we are as a people."

In 2013, the Tribe's 30th Restoration will be celebrated on Friday, Nov. 22, and Thanksgiving will fall six days later on Thursday, Nov. 28. ■



Senior Miss Grand Ronde Kiana Leno, left, and Peter Nelson dance an owl dance during the 29th Restoration Celebration Powwow at the Tribal gym.

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Grand Ronde and Veterans' Royalty performs "The Lord's Prayer" during the 29th Restoration Celebration at the Tribal gym on Sunday, Nov. 18.

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Aleena Westley, 8, performs a jingle dress dance during an Intertribal dance of the 29th Restoration Celebration Powwow at the Tribal gym on Sunday, Nov. 18.



Tribal Council member Jon A. George reads a raffle ticket number during the 29th Restoration Celebration at the Tribal gym on Sunday, Nov. 18. George was master of ceremonies for the celebration and helping him are Grand Ronde Royalty princesses Makenzie Aaron, left, and Amaryssa Mooney.



Shasta Simmons, 7, receives help from her mother Robin as she prepares her regalia for the powwow at the Tribal gym.



Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno speaks about Restoration.



Selena Ulestad dances with other Grand Ronde Canoe Family girls as they perform during the 29th Restoration Celebration at the Tribal gym on Sunday, Nov. 18.