

Visiting the Tribe

On Friday, Feb. 22, a group of 25 students from Willamette University in Salem traveled to Grand Ronde to learn about the Tribe. The group consisted of students from two classes, Native American and First Nations Film and Nine Tribes of Oregon. They ate lunch with the Elders at the Elders' Activity Center, had question-and-answer time with Tribal Council and heard some Tribal history from Bobby Mercier, Tribal Culture & Language specialist, in the plankhouse where members of the Grand Ronde Canoe Family also drummed and sang. Public Affairs coordinated the event.



Willamette University students gather around Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison, right, as she talks about the Tribe and its history during lunch at the Elders' Activity Center on Friday, Feb. 22.

Photos by Michelle Alaimo

After Willamette University students were given a brief Grand Ronde Tribal history, members of the Grand Ronde Canoe Family drum and sing for them in the plankhouse.



Tribal Council member Chris Mercier, left, hands a Willamette University student a gift at the end of a student group's visit to Grand Ronde on Friday, Feb. 22. Mercier invited the group after he and Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison spoke to the class at Willamette University.

Tribal leaders received briefing

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Tribal Council Executive Coordinator Stacia Martin and Assistant Tribal Attorney Kim D'Aquila.

During a 10 a.m. meeting, Tribal leaders received a briefing from lobbyists representing Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes, including Grand Ronde lobbyist and member Justin Martin.

During a noon brown bag luncheon, Tribal Council member Cheryl A. Kennedy joined other Oregon Tribal leaders in addressing about 30 state employees, explaining the long and often tortured history of Oregon's Native Americans, as well as assert Tribal sovereignty in the 21st century.

The day started at 9 a.m. when eight of Oregon's nine Tribes set up information tables in the Capitol's Galleria; only the Burns Paiute Tribe was absent.

Staffing the Grand Ronde information table was Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor and Acting Public Affairs Secretary Chelsea Clark. They handed out Tribal ceded lands maps, a flier about the upcoming Veteran's Summit, a Spirit Mountain Community Fund brochure and the most recent copy of *Smoke Signals*.

At 10 a.m., Tribal leaders congregated in Hearing Room 50 to listen to Martin and other Tribal

lobbyists discuss Native issues that may come up before the current Legislature.

Two of the biggest issues, Martin said, concerned education: Lobbying for an Indian Education Specialist position in the state Department of Education and the continuing controversy regarding the Department of Education recently prohibiting Native American mascots at Oregon public schools.

The proposal to create an Indian Education Specialist at the state Department of Education has been around since 2003, but ran into a major roadblock after the recession hit in 2007 and getting new positions included in a dwindling state budget was impossible.

Phil Donovan, the lobbyist for the Umatilla Tribe, said that with state revenues once again starting to increase, the chances of finally getting the position included in the state budget are looking better.

"We are working on getting a position, which is not nearly enough but is a starting point, at the Department of Education to focus on implementing the Indian Education Plan," he said.

Martin said there are currently four bills introduced to overturn the Department of Education's Native American mascot ban.

Martin said the Grand Ronde Tribe favors the one submitted by Rep. Sherrie Springer, R-Scio,

which would allow school districts and local Tribes to work together and if they agree on use of a Native American mascot, it would supersede the Department of Education's ban.

"It gets around the Board of Education essentially telling us individual sovereigns what we can and can't do when working with local school districts," Martin said.

Another important issue, Martin said, was getting Tribes included in the statute that requires the state's Financial Estimates Committee to ascertain the economic effect of proposed ballot measures.

When Measures 82 and 83 were on the 2012 ballot, seeking approval of private casinos in Oregon and one specifically in Wood Village, the devastating financial effect those would have had on Oregon Tribal governments was not taken into account; just the economic effect on state, county and local governments.

"Just yesterday, Senate Bill 18 passed out of committee unanimously," Martin said. "Hopefully now we're going to be included when the state looks at economic impacts during ballot measures. We all know that we just fought a big fight there and Oregonians did not get the true picture of what was going on."

At noon, Kennedy joined six other Tribal leaders to discuss Native American history in Oregon

and sovereignty before about 30 employees from the Department of Corrections, Department of Revenue, Oregon State Library, Department of State Lands, Oregon Youth Authority, Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Employment during a brown bag session.

"We are sovereign nations," Kennedy said about the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon. "We have a different standing than other minority groups. We have a legal and political standing because of our sovereignty and recognition from the United States government that we are the peoples of the land; that we were here before anyone else was."

Most of the Tribal leaders stressed the large amounts of land that their individual Tribe ceded to the federal government and the obligations that came along with those treaties.

Martin ultimately summed up the importance of the day during his presentation.

"If we're not at the table for these discussions that affect the state level, we're actually lessening our influence," Martin said. "It's very important for us to work on presence and how can we effectively work to maintain that presence."

The day was sponsored by the Legislative Commission on Indian Services. ■