

Tribe protests event honoring Phil Sheridan

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

It's not surprising that a Native American Tribe would take umbrage about an event honoring the man credited with saying "the only good Indian I met was a dead Indian."

Add to that that the event was held only 15 miles from the Tribe's Reservation and you'd understand why the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde was not happy about Sheridan Days returning to its former name, Phil Sheridan Days.

Between 1934 and 1995, Sheridan celebrated Phil Sheridan Days, named after the career U.S. Army officer who was stationed in the Oregon Territory before becoming a celebrated Civil War general.

After a three-year break in the celebration, the event resumed in 1999 with a new name, Sheridan Days, which celebrated the town more than the general. References to Gen. Phil Sheridan were dropped at the joint request of the Grand Ronde Tribe and Spirit Mountain Casino.

However, between June 20-23, Phil Sheridan Days returned.

Committee President Bob White said he and Vice President Ted Mayfield made it official when they registered Phil Sheridan Days with the Secretary of State's Corporate Division in April.

White called Sheridan a "great

American general" and wore a replica Sheridan uniform during the Days' grand parade.

In a letter to the editor following the event, White wrote, "The new name and return to our beginnings caused a lot of excitement in some quarters. Our intention was never to offend our good neighbors who are such a dynamic influence in this neck of the woods. Our sincere apologies if we damaged some egos."

Sheridan Mayor Val Adamson was quoted as saying he supported the return to Phil Sheridan Days.

Tribal Council Chair Reyn Leno said it was a "sad commentary on the local community." He said it showed a lack of respect for Sheridan's neighboring Tribal community and insensitivity to Gen. Sheridan's well-documented mistreatment of Native Americans.

"We find it disturbing that the organizing committee would want to change the name back to Phil Sheridan Days," Leno said. "The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde are convinced there is much to celebrate about today's Sheridan community and the strong people, both Tribal and nonTribal, who built it and continue to make it thrive today."

"We are happy to support many projects in the community, from Little League to wrestling teams, but Phil Sheridan Days is some-

thing we cannot in good conscience endorse. If anyone wants to learn what history has to say about Gen. Phil Sheridan, a simple Internet search will provide countless texts that document his actions against Native Americans."

It is Gen. Sheridan's post-Civil War genocidal resume that remains offensive to modern-day Native Americans.

After the Civil War, he prosecuted a war on the buffalo in an effort to deprive Plains Indian Tribes of a vital food resource.

When the Texas Legislature considered outlawing bison poaching on Tribal lands, Sheridan testified against it, suggesting that the Legislature should give each of the hunters a medal, engraved with a dead buffalo on one side and a discouraged-looking Indian on the other.

As head of the Department of the Missouri, Sheridan attacked the Cheyenne, Kiowa and Comanche Tribes in their winter quarters in 1868-69, taking their supplies and livestock and killing those who resisted.

While stationed in Oregon before the Civil War, he took a Native woman as his mistress and then left

the fact out of his memoirs.

Previous to his tenure at the Grand Ronde Agency, Sheridan — then a lieutenant — helped capture Cascade Indians assumed to have committed the Whitman Massacre because their gun barrels smelled of having been recently fired. They were eventually hung in Oregon City in the first public hanging in Oregon for crimes they did not commit.

"I think it is a step backward for any gains that we might have had in the healing process," said Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. about the name change. "I grew up here and there was lots of tension and stuff between Grand Ronde and Sheridan in the 1950s and '60s. It was pretty bad."

"With the contributions that Grand Ronde has made to the overall community in keeping them involved, we had gone down the path of healing. Taking Phil's name off of Phil Sheridan Days was a step forward. Now what it really is is a step backward. I don't know that people sometimes really care about our feelings. It's unfortunate." ■

Includes information from the Yamhill County News-Register.

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