

Community Fund grants find synergy

\$451,212 worth of grants given to 23 nonprofits as Fund exceeds \$59 million in total giving

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

"Working together for 23 amazing projects" is the way that Kathleen George, executive director of Spirit Mountain Community Fund, introduced the spring grant presentation on Wednesday, June 12, in Tribal Council Chambers.

This quarter, the Community Fund awarded grants totaling \$451,212.

George described gifts for the second quarter as creating "a healthier, better educated and safer Oregon."

"It's important for (grantees) to come here," said Tribal Council Secretary Toby McClary, who also is a Community Fund board member, "because we are more than just a casino. We like to share our story. And, at the same time, we get to give grants to make the state a better place to live."

"Our reward is the work you do," said Community Fund Board Chairman Sho Dozono, referring to grant recipients

Community Fund grants support projects in education, health, arts and culture, environment, historic preservation and public safety. Funding equals 6 percent of profits from Spirit Mountain Casino.

This quarter's recipients include three aimed squarely at the foster home experience in Oregon. George said that the Community Fund board selected the three agencies to emphasize the Tribe's commitment to children and families, and to support synergy among nonprofits working together.

"We work closely with Multnomah/Washington counties CASA program," said Robin Christian, executive director of Children First for Oregon, a Portland-based child and family advocacy group.

Children First received \$50,000 for the project "Fostering Success: Youth Empowerment, Transitional Support & Higher Education Opportunities." It aims "to improve the experience of foster care for over 13,000 Oregon kids who are in the system and over 400 who age out each year," according to its application. Some 3,000 American Indian and Alaska Native children in Multnomah County alone will be reached in this project.

"We ask ourselves what do we know that can help their CASAs to be better," said Christian.

Funded by the grant is a leadership development program, the Oregon Foster Youth Connection, for at-risk foster youth between the ages of 14-25.

Children First is also part of the Permanency Coalition, a group of eight public and private agencies that are working together, Christian said, on a combination of direct service and advocacy issues.

"Working together, we're concerned with how to get kids to permanency sooner. What happens is we each bring a unique perspective," Christian said.

This is the eighth grant to Children First, making the total Trib-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Morgen Brodie, left, a Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service board member, talks with Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George during the Fund's spring grant presentation at the Governance Center on Wednesday, June 12. The nonprofit received a \$34,000 grant.

al commitment to the group at \$225,000.

The Portland-based National Indian Child Welfare Association received \$50,000 for a project called, "Bring Our Children Safely Home Initiative."

The project is an example of collaboration and synergy that addresses long-standing problems in Indian Country child welfare programs "by engaging stakeholders as allies." The inter-agency approach aims to divert families from out-of-home placement to in-home services. It also intends to reduce the need for out-of-home care and widen safety concerns.

The National Indian Child Welfare Association also collaborates with local CASAs to help train their volunteers, said Executive Director Terry Cross (Seneca). "This important work cannot be done

without collaborating extensively and securing the involvement of other agencies from public child welfare departments and advocacy organizations to the courts and Tribes," he said.

"We're committed to acting jointly to find solutions to social problems that no one organization can tackle alone," Cross said.

This is the fifth grant to the association, bringing the total Tribal support up to \$100,000.

The McMinnville-based Yamhill County CASA received \$8,700 for a project called "Raising Awareness."

The grant will make it possible for CASA "to train and support new volunteers to advocate in court on behalf of abused and neglected children." The grant will change the lives of as many as 30 children in the first year. CASA volunteers serve an average three children each.

"Yamhill County CASA has a long history of partnering with other agencies in advancing the best interests of children we represent," said Executive Director Sarah Shipley.

CASA has developed close relationships with the courts and the state Department of Human Services, and partners with Juliette's House in McMinnville.

The Oregon CASA network "is actively promoting opportunities for local programs to maximize resources," Shipley said.

This is the fifth grant to Yamhill County CASA, raising the Tribe's commitment to the county program to \$45,100.

The Community Fund makes quarterly awards as well as separate grants to Oregon Tribes that are awarded once annually in July.

"It's important that we get to meet you face to face today," said George. "For many, this might be the only time we meet you."

Tribal Council and community members serve on the Community Fund board. In addition to Dozono and McClary, Tribal Council Chair Reyn Leno and Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. also serve on the board. Other trustees are Secretary of State Kate Brown, consultant Henry "Chip" Lazenby, former Congresswoman Darlene Hooley and Ron Reibach, director of Facilities at Spirit Mountain Casino.

Tribal Council member Jon A. George gave the invocation before the grant checks were presented.

Since its inception in 1997, the fund has made gifts of more than \$59 million in the fields of education, health, arts and culture, environment, historic preservation and public safety.

"The Tribe sees itself as part of the solution," said Kathleen George. ■

Recipients of Spirit Mountain Community Fund grants on June 12 were:

- African American Health Coalition, Health Coaching to Avoid Chronic Disease, \$22,118; for an overall total of \$80,451.
- American Heart Association Inc., "Have a Heart, Save a Life," \$33,740. This is the group's first award from the Community Fund.
- Autism Society of Oregon, Autism Workshops Program, \$4,975; the agency's first grant.
- Blindskills Inc., "Information in Up-to-Date Digital Media for Newly-Blinded Oregonians," \$5,000, for a total of \$10,000.
- CAUSA Oregon, "CAUSA Oregon Immigrant Integration Initiative," \$20,000, for a total of \$40,000.
- Cedar Creek Child Care Center, "Kindergarten Readiness," \$5,000, for a total of \$25,000.
- Children First for Oregon, "Fostering Success: Youth Empowerment, Transitional Support & Higher Education Opportunities," \$50,000, for a total of \$225,000.
- Doernbecher Children's Hospital Foundation, "Pediatric Diabetes Telemedicine Clinic," \$25,000, for a total of \$393,000.
- Friends of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, "Expanding Engagement: Serving Our Whole Community," \$5,000, for a total of \$10,000.
- Loaves and Fishes, "Healthy Food for Homebound Seniors," \$40,000, for a total of \$265,000.
- Materials Exchange Center for Community Arts/MECCA, "Materials Exchange Infrastructure Improvements," \$5,000; this is the first grant to this nonprofit.
- Microenterprise Resources, "Initiatives & Training, Fostering Entrepreneurship in Grand Ronde," \$7,000, for a total of \$22,000.
- Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service, "Center for Hope and Safety Community Room," \$34,000, for a total of \$95,741.
- National Indian Child Welfare Association, "Bring Our Children Safely Home Initiative," \$50,000, for a total of \$100,000.
- Oregon Public Broadcasting, "OPB's New Arts and Culture Radio Magazine," \$18,000, for a total of \$393,000.
- Oregon State University Foundation, "The Family Sharing Garden," \$24,820, for a total of \$150,820.
- PDX Summer School, "Provide Quality Reading Curriculum for English Language Learners This Summer!" \$2,100; this is the group's first grant.
- Raphael House of Portland, "Healthy Relationships Education for Teens and Adults," \$25,000, for a total of \$375,000.
- Red Lodge Transition Services, "Positive Indian Parenting Program," \$5,000, for a total of \$11,000.
- The Piece, A Camp Odyssey, "Turning Oregon Teens into Emerging Community Leaders," \$5,000; this is the first grant for this agency.
- United Cerebral Palsy of Oregon and SW Washington, "Build self-sufficiency of disabled adults by increasing Employment Solutions' capacity," \$25,000; this is the nonprofit's first grant.
- University of Oregon Foundation, "khanumakwst nsayka chxi-tilixam wawa: Our youth talk together," \$30,759, for a total of \$390,759.
- Yamhill County CASA, "Raising Awareness," \$8,700, for a total of \$45,100. ■