

Tom named to Salem's International Council

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Who knew that Salem, a few miles down the road from the Grand Ronde Reservation, is an important international city?

That is just the point and the reason why Salem Mayor Anna M. Peterson came up with the idea of an International Council to spread the word.

"We are honored to live and work near, and with, individuals from so many diverse cultures and communities," Peterson says. "We are looking forward to the platform for enriching discussion we believe this council will provide."

Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom was selected for Salem's International Council "with the hope that she'll bring her perspective as a Native American to help us understand Tribal culture, background and current activities," said Gretchen Bennett, Salem City Hall liaison to the new entity. She also serves as coordinator for Human Rights & Relations and Federal Compliance at City Hall.

"The mayor saw the value of including an American Indian representative," said Bennett. She brought the idea to Grand Ronde Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, who brought it to Tribal Council, which then appointed Tom.

Tom was installed on the Salem International Council on Monday, Dec. 9.

"This is a good opportunity to educate (the people of Salem) about our ceded lands and also about the First Peoples here," Tom said at the Dec. 10 Legislative Action Committee meeting.

"The mayor first identified a chair and vice chair, and spent the summer discussing the basic concepts," Bennett said.

The chair is Michelle Vlach-Ing, a Salem attorney who grew up in Hawaii and has relatives in China. Vice chair is Dr. John Choppala, a medical lab consultant who is active in INDUS, a friendship organization for India.

Other members include Willie Richardson, Oregon NW Black Pioneer; Michael Um, affiliated



Kathleen Tom

with Gimhae, Salem's South Korea Sister City; Yoshifumi Daikoku, affiliated with Kawagoe, Salem's Japan Sister City; Jaya Srinivasan, also affiliated with INDUS; Jose Gonzales of the Latino Business Alliance; David Anitok of the Oregon Marshallese Community; Bennie Williams of the NAACP; Levi Herrera Lopez of Mano a Mano; and Eddie Bumabon with the Greater Filipino Association.

Fourteen in all, so far.

"That (number) is flexible," Bennett said. "We anticipate others. The mayor was thinking about a balance, understanding we can't have everybody. We would like to celebrate and recognize the cultural and international diversity of Salem."

"People may not be aware of how diversified Salem residents are. We hope this is one way to do that. There are so many cultural communities in Salem, but we can't have a council with 500 members. This is really a snapshot of some of the many cultures that are here."

The idea of the International Council emerged in May when Patterson brought it to the Salem City Council and members approved it immediately, Bennett said.

Specifically, the purpose of the International Council is "to recognize, celebrate and promote the diverse and international culture of the city of Salem," says the City Hall information sheet. "The council highlights positive contributions in the area of cultural and international relations in Salem."

Meetings are anticipated two or three times a year with the first one scheduled for Jan. 7.

"Everybody was excited about our participation," Tom said. "Mayor Peterson and the Salem City Council appreciate that Salem is in the ceded lands of the Grand Ronde Tribe. Our Tribe has been here since time immemorial and we continue to extend the hand of friendship to all people." ■

White retirement to be feted

The Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority will celebrate the retirement of bookkeeper Terri White at noon Tuesday, Dec. 17, at the authority's offices on Tyee Road.

There will be cake and coffee, and all are invited to attend.

White started working for the Tribe in May 1997. ■

Veterans Benefit session slated

Jerry Wilson, Yamhill County Veterans Service Officer, will be on hand from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 16, in the Tribal Community Center to answer questions for veterans seeking to access military benefits.

He will answer questions about what benefits are available, what the eligibility requirements are, and help with claim forms and the documentation needed to file claims for benefits.

All services will be provided free of charge and veterans need to bring their DD214 (military certificate of discharge).

Veterans should check in with Social Services receptionist Rhonda Leno at 503-879-2034. For more information, contact Wilson at 503-434-7503. ■

Maintaining skills



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Jeffrey Rogers, a groundskeeper with the Tribe's Facilities Department, practices wiring a light fixture to a circuit box during a hands-on maintenance training for the Tribe's maintenance staff on Tuesday, Dec. 3. The three-day training, which covered electrical and plumbing lessons, was provided by the National American Indian Housing Council. The Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority is a member of the council and training is provided through the membership when requested. A mix of 11 GRTHA maintenance technicians and Facilities and Maintenance employees participated in the training where understanding basic concepts of electricity and plumbing, replacing circuit breakers, outlets, switches and light fixtures and repairing faucet leaks were just a few of the skills taught.

'It's about regaining our sovereignty'

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said about resurrecting the Salmon Celebration. "Our job is to help that vision come alive. It's not just about tradition. It's about regaining our sovereignty."

He talked about the "difficult road" that the Grand Ronde people have walked for 30 years. Lost during those years were fishing and hunting rights. He called it "blackmail" that forced early Tribal leaders to sign away those rights in return for support of the Tribe's Restoration efforts.

"They did what was best for our people," Leno said.

In the future, he said, crediting the Lilo group's songs, those "little guys" will be ready to lead the Tribe.

In opening the lines for the salmon meal prepared by the Tribe's Food Services staff, Leno noted his longstanding aversion to the traditional fish. Quoting Elder and former Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr., he called himself an eater of "side hill salmon." In some circles, that is called deer.

For him and others, the traditional meal also featured pot roast with rice, squash, salad and pie.

Among the dignitaries in attendance were Katie Gauthier, representing U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley's office; Carla and Matthew Starrett-Bigg, representing the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon; Rick Klumph, a parks ranger with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife;

Don Russo, representing Marion County Commissioner Patty Milne; Alyssa Macy, representing the Native Arts and Culture Foundation; Drew Mahalic of the Oregon Sports Authority; Lesley Bennett of Willamette Partnership; Wade Byers with Clackamas Heritage Partners; and Vanessa Bird of the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership.

In addition to Leno and Kennedy, other members of the Tribal Council in attendance were Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr. and Jon A. George.

The Coho salmon run, peaking in November, was a lot stronger than last year at 424, said Natural Resources Manager Michael Wilson, who also attended the Salmon Celebration. He added that the Coho return coming up Agency Creek this year was "a good number."

The best year for Coho coming up Agency Creek, a few years ago, numbered close to 1,000, he said.

The department has been building and improving habitat along Agency Creek since the department opened its doors more than 20 years ago. In recent years, Wilson said, the effort has proved to be successful.

"However, as Chairman Leno said, it will take the continued efforts of many different groups to see lasting results from our work," Wilson said.

The celebration was coordinated by the Tribal Public Affairs staff members Siobhan Taylor and Chelsea Clark. ■