

# Legislative Day helps build relationships

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Two Grand Ronde culture photographs sat on easels in the state Capitol Galleria on Thursday, Feb. 13. The easels sat in front of two photos and one painted representation of Oregon's three state Capitols dating back to 1854.

The scene set the stage for Tribal Governments Legislative Day, an annual forum during which Oregon Tribal representatives can interact with legislative and state agency staff, as well as the public.

"This is a first step in the development of a Tribal-state partnership," said Grand Ronde Tribal Council Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr.

"There are so many people in Oregon that don't know what we do or what sovereignty is. This is an opportunity for people to stop by and take our literature and find out who we are," said Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom.

With all nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon attending, Tribal lobbyist Justin Martin observed that the event has become a place where Tribes also speak to each other.

"That's huge," Martin said. "Any time we get the opportunity to tell who we are, why we exist and how we're a positive force in the fabric of Oregon, it's a positive for the Tribe."

The event, organized annually by the Legislative Commission on Indian Services, is "an attempt to provide legislative agencies and Tribal governments to interact," said Karen Quigley, executive director of the commission. "It's an informal morning to visit primarily staff and provide them with Tribal information."

Success can be measured, she said, when Tribal leaders are re-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Tribal Council Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr. talks about the Tribe's ceded lands with Joanna Robert, local program coordinator for the Oregon Department of Transportation, during Tribal Governments Legislative Day in the State Capitol's Galleria in Salem on Thursday, Feb. 13.**

laxed and comfortable in the state Capitol. "In the beginning (of this event, started 15 years ago as Tribal Information Day), Tribal leaders were not so used to being in the Capitol in this type of setting. They are now, and that's an achievement."

"We can be a resource on culture, on legal issues," said Grand Ronde Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor. "We want to put in their minds the government-to-government relationship and that on shared issues they should come to Tribes first. It is important that we come together for communications coordination."

Kris Mitchell, manager of the federal National Environmental Protection Act and Cultural Resources for the Oregon Military Department, came by to meet with Tribal Council members and staff. "I like to see what everybody's up to," he said.

With federal and state lands all over Oregon set aside for military exercises and training, Mitchell said he partners with Oregon Tribes often.

"The department is a land managing agency," he said. "Tribes are one of our partners. We work together to minimize adverse impacts on the land."

Dennis Holmes, administrator of Religious Services for the state Department of Corrections, also attended. His goal? "Just network," he said. "Find out how things are going. It's really informal. I answer questions, and then of course there's the frybread."

Staff from Portland-based Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest made frybread just outside of the Capitol during the event. They brought the Native delicacy inside and passed it around.

As chair of the Public Safety Cluster meetings, Holmes makes it a practice to consult with all nine

of Oregon's Tribes. One result has been the building of sweat lodges for Native American prisoners at all 14 correctional facilities, though he says that other inmates also have participated in the Native American practice.

By mid-morning, Giffen had seen staff from five state departments, he said, "and the day's not half-done."

"It's pretty educational," said Giffen, "and it's a better setting now than we have had." Previously, Tribal leaders went from office to office to reach out to legislators and agency heads.

"The main thing for me," he said, "is that we're a government and are looking for respect in our government-to-government relations."

"Tribal government is the basic message we are trying to get across on this and every other day — that Tribes have governmental status," Quigley said in an e-mail.

Regarding Oregon Department of Transportation staff in particular, Giffen said that now is the time to develop the Tribe's Tribal Employment Rights Office program.

"This is the time to educate agencies about it. Everybody's excited to work with Grand Ronde," he said. "They see the strength of working with us. These days, government funds only go so far."

For Tribal Council member Denise Harvey, the day brought her back in touch with two contacts that she used to work with. She let John Mohlis, executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, know that the Tribe had established a TERO program.

He said, Harvey related, "I don't understand that program. We have to get together. I need to know about this."

The other contact was Orvie Danzuka, who worked in the Tribe's Natural Resources Department, but is now a Tribal Council member with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

Harvey and Danzuka worked together in different capacities in the past. They have new roles now, but getting reacquainted is going to help them work more efficiently and cooperatively on new issues, Harvey said.

Among Grand Ronde Tribal Council members also attending were Chairman Reyn Leno and Tribal Council members Cheryle A. Kennedy, June Sherer, Jon A. George and Ed Pearsall. ■

## Grand Ronde Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

The Grand Ronde Tribe is operating its own Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to assist Grand Ronde Tribal member households with energy payments (utility bills, firewood, etc.), energy emergencies and weatherization (e.g. furnace repairs). Income eligible households within Polk, Yamhill, Marion, Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties with a Grand Ronde Tribal member are eligible to apply. CTGR members in these counties need to contact Grand Ronde to receive assistance instead of from the community action agency in their area. Grand Ronde's program enables more CTGR members to be served than would otherwise have been possible.

If you are interested in obtaining services contact Social Services at 1-800-242-8196 for energy assistance and the Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority at 503-879-2405 for weatherization. The Tribe's LIHEAP program also serves all income eligible Indians on Grand Ronde Reservation or trust land.



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