

In search of food self-sufficiency

Meeting discusses new food bank under construction

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

With \$500,000 from a federal Housing and Urban Development Indian Community Development block grant and a \$167,000 Tribal Housing Authority match, the Grand Ronde Tribe has designed and now is building a new, larger and more comprehensive food collection and distribution center for the community.

The building has been designed to handle food from Salem-based Marion-Polk Food Share and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Distribution Program on Indian reservations. Regulations require food from each program be kept separate and be available on different days.

The Grand Ronde Community Resource Center, a local non-profit, has been receiving food from Food Share for years, but now a new Tribal partnership with Food Share may be emerging. If approved by Tribal Council, plans are afoot that will enable Food Share personnel to take a larger role in programs to lead the community toward food self-sufficiency.

Under the plan being considered, Food Share will bring its leadership skills and experience with food self-sufficiency to Grand Ronde to help create new possibilities for the local food bank.

The partnership would be unique to both the Tribe and Food Share. And the local food bank and community gardens will participate.

Marion-Polk Food Share supplies food to the Community Resource Center and 97 other partners in its service area.

One goal for Food Share, said President and CEO Rick Gaupo, is "to foster and help a community to the point that they no longer need Food Share, or emergency food assistance."

"Without the food box (from Food Share)," said community member

Greg Van Houten, "a lot of people would be going hungry, or starving."

At a May 14 lunch meeting held in the Tribal Community Center to discuss the new 3,300-square-foot facility that broke ground in May, Tribal Planning Director Rick George solicited questions and comments from a group of about 30 in attendance.

With lasagna, salad, rolls and dessert under their belts, community members turned their attention to food for the future.

The new facility will replace the current operation located in an old house at the entrance to Uyxat Powwow Grounds off Hebo Road. The new building will be centrally located on the Curl property, next to the current recycling center and across from the Tribal Housing Authority building on Grand Ronde Road.

Sitting on half an acre, the facility will have 1,500 square feet for a warehouse distribution center with 100 square feet each for walk-in cooler and freezer units. Storage racks and plenty of space inside will accommodate people waiting for or selecting groceries, and there will be a play area for children.

The local Clothes Closet will be housed there and laundry facilities for the Clothes Closet will be available. Office space, a private interview room and restrooms are also part of the plan.

A kitchen training room will be a "hybrid, with the feel of a residential kitchen, but also the commercial advantage of being state-approved for packaging," said Tribal Engineer and Public Works Manager Jesse White, who is overseeing design and construction of the project.

Plans also call for raised planter beds around the facility and discussions are underway to reserve more land for community gardening projects. The new food bank will have 18 parking spaces.

Although this facility is "as big as we can go with the dollars allotted and still be able to meet the needs of the community," White said, "there is plenty of room to expand."

"The Community Garden is in

support of the food bank," said Community Garden representative Patty LeClair, who went on to describe "all kinds of healthy things" growing and all kinds of jobs for volunteers to fill. "It's all for the community," she said.

The Community Garden, located on Grand Ronde Road at Second Street, has a new greenhouse, 32 rebuilt and raised planting beds and two planting beds designed to allow handicapped volunteers to participate.

"Strawberries, raspberries, cranberries and grapes already are growing there," LeClair said, and jobs needing volunteers include planting, hoeing and watering.

"It is people-run and people-driven," said George.

Different regulations for the Food Share program and the USDA dictate who is eligible for each program's food.

A contained area and active involvement by both the community and Tribal Council are requirements Food Share needs to take the Tribal food bank one step further, said Gaupo.

The effort intends "to control the Tribal community's food destiny," he said. The extra involvement by Food Share will include help setting up the infrastructure for a smooth-running, well-planned operation that makes the most of many possibilities. Those might include examples of what a good garden looks like, or packaging and distribution help with some of the gardens' harvests.

Facilities will allow the community to teach canning processes and do actual canning as the garden reaches harvest time.

"Without community involvement," he said, "it will all go nowhere."

This is more than Food Share can currently do with any of the other 97 partner agencies, said Gaupo, because those agencies lack the government involvement that Tribal Council provides in Grand Ronde, and a contained area for distribution.

Plans from the Tribe's point of view, said George, also should address "community planning and development around food."

He asked the group to come back in two months with new ideas about community needs, including maybe a local store for Tribal foods and crafts, parks and recreation opportunities.

Young adults, college graduates in their early 20s, also will be part of this Tribal effort, said Gaupo. The young adults have volunteered for the AmeriCorps Resource Assistance for Rural Environments program based at the University of Oregon. It was created to help Oregon's rural communities and to improve their economic, social and environmental conditions.

"The folks at the food bank have done a great job through the years and will continue to do a great job in the future," said Mark Johnston, outgoing general manager for the Tribe, who introduced the meeting. ■

Mending Broken Hearts training set

The White Bison Mending Broken Hearts training returns to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde on Wednesday through Friday, June 18-20, at the Tribal Education Center, 9615 Grand Ronde Road.

The purpose of the training is to offer a culturally based way of healing from grief, loss and intergenerational trauma, especially for Native American people in the United States and Canada.

The training is free, but people must register to attend. Participants are asked for a three-day commitment and must attend from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day.

To register or to obtain more information, contact Alcohol and Drug Counselor Karan Scharf at 503-879-2029.

The training is sponsored by the Tribe's Behavioral Health Program and funded through a Meth and Suicide Prevention Initiative grant. ■



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In 2012, the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board will launch a companion website: www.wernative.org. The site is being designed for Native youth, by Native youth, to encourage healthy behaviors, share youth-friendly media and current events, increase cultural identity and pride, and share the positive impacts Native youth are having on their communities.

Funded by the National IHS HIV Program

For more information, please contact
Jessica Leston: jlston@npihb.org or visit us at: <http://www.npihb.org/epicenter/project/projectredaction>


