

'Once a vet, always a vet'

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Kulongoski. He served as chair for one year, becoming the first Native American to serve on the committee, as well as serve as its chair.

LaBonte worked toward two goals during his term on the Governor's Advisory Committee: ensuring continued funding of the existing veterans' home in The Dalles and building a second one in Lebanon. Veterans build the homes and support them with private contributions.

The Dalles home has been funded without a break since LaBonte served on the Governor's Advisory Committee.

The second home is "coming along," LaBonte said, and is scheduled to open in September.

LaBonte also sought legislation to equalize payments to all veterans. The so-called "a vet is a vet is a vet" bill ensures that veterans are paid equally, whether they served in a battle zone or were based in the United States. LaBonte has been practicing that policy for years in Grand Ronde.

He has been a longtime member of the Grand Ronde Color Guard. His leadership and hard work made it possible for the Tribe to supply color guards to veterans' events for many years across Oregon.

He also has worked for many years with the Northwest Indian Veterans Association.

"He is a community member who always goes beyond the call, helping people whenever he's needed," said Tribal Elder and Veterans Spe-



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Veterans, including Navy veteran Jesse (Pewee) Robertson, front, participate in the 1 p.m. Grand Entry of the 2014 Marcellus Norwest Memorial Veterans Powwow held at Uyxat Powwow Grounds on Saturday, July 12.

cial Event Board Chairman Steve Bobb Sr. "He is a very big part of all of our lives."

With typical self-effacing humor, LaBonte, 73, translated that into, "I think they want to get rid of me." As a way of saying they weren't going to succeed, he added, "You can't give up on veterans. Once a vet, always a vet."

Veteran Bill Stam, who runs the

All Nations Native American Veterans Memorial in Jefferson, said, "Gene has kept me out of trouble." He presented the veteran of the moment with a copy of a plaque honoring him. The original will be mounted at the All Nation's memorial.

"You can't do anything by yourself," LaBonte said. "Without (so many veterans who have helped

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him over the years) I could have been nothing."

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, a Marine Corps veteran, and Tribal Council member June Sherer, an Army veteran, presented a blanket to LaBonte and draped it over his shoulders.

"For your effort and commitment," said Leno, "may you always be surrounded by warmth and surrounded with love."

LaBonte also received a plaque and a gift certificate for a stay at the Oregon Coast.

His wife, Billie, and four generations of the LaBonte family were in attendance for the honoring. Later that day, the family was headed to the wedding of granddaughter Brianna Nann.

This year's Veterans Powwow, "Honoring Our Warriors Past and Present," also honored two Tribal World War II veterans who walked on earlier this year – Allen "Biff" Langley and Eugene Hudson – as well as a special event honoring Korean War veterans.

The powwow started with the first Grand Entry, drummed in by host drum West Hill Boys, at 7 p.m. Friday. It was the first of four grand

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Hailey Lewis-Little does a shawl dance during an Intertribal dance at the 2014 Marcellus Norwest Memorial Veterans Powwow held at Uyxat Powwow Grounds on Saturday, July 12.

