

Second Renewing Spirits luncheon shines light on domestic, sexual abuse

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Elders' Activity Center dining room was packed during the second annual Renewing Spirits luncheon held Monday, Oct 6.

Outside of the luncheon, information tables stretched straight back, holding all kinds of pamphlets about domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The tables were staffed with about a dozen specialist providers representing Yamhill, Polk, Marion and Lincoln counties, nonprofits (Juliette's House, Henderson House, Sable House and Liberty House, among many) and two Tribes – the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians' Indian Care Program and the Grand Ronde Tribe's Domestic Violence Program – each with a niche service in the fight to end domestic and/or sexual violence within their communities.

Annie Falla, the Grand Ronde Tribe's Domestic Violence Program coordinator, said that one of the luncheon's aims was to introduce a coordinated response to sexual abuse cases. The response means giving the best information and knowing all available resources to give every victim the same chances.

The coordinated response also means among Tribal programs and between community programs.

Falla and her Advisory Board have started the groundwork for a Sexual Assault Response Resource Circle, a program similar to Sexual Assault Response Teams operating in all of Oregon's 36 counties, but with a Tribal focus.

SARRC principles seek a program that is community-driven, multi-disciplinary, inter-agency, victim-centered and offender-focused.

The grant funding for the Renewing Spirits luncheon also provides money to train two nurses to be Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-certified. The funding was granted by the Northwest Portland Area



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal member Amber Case talks about her experiences with domestic violence during the Renewing Spirits luncheon held at the Elders' Activity Center on Monday, Oct. 6. Listening in the background is Annie Falla, the Tribe's Domestic Violence Program coordinator, who was part of the team that organized the event.

At right, JC Rogers pets Marybeth II during the Renewing Spirits luncheon held at the Elders' Activity Center on Monday, Oct. 6. Marybeth II is the Yamhill County District Attorney's courthouse dog and she was at the event with her handler Sarah Grabner, the county's crime victim advocate.

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Indian Health Board for the second year in a row.

In order to make this happen, the SARRC committee is staffed by Tribal police, Social Services and Health & Wellness Clinic employees, and members of the community and nonprofits across the local area.

Falla helped coordinate the luncheon through her 15-member Advisory Board.

"Increasing public awareness is definitely the first step," said Jeff

Falla. Statistics show that of all American women, one in five will be raped in their lifetime. In Indian communities across the country, one in three will be raped.

In addition, Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of sexual assault than women across the United States.

Previously, Falla helped start a 24-hour crisis line. In June, the crisis line received more than 30 calls, she said, but none in the last three weeks.

Falla also started a support group and healing circle at the Tribe for those needing to heal from past and current hurts.

Crisis time is coming again, said Tribal Police Chief Al LaChance. "Domestic violence offenses always increase at holiday time," he said.

Overall though, Tribal police have seen only a small number of domestic violence cases reported on the Reservation.

"We're going to continue to educate not only the community, but also Tribal members on the importance of reporting domestic violence and sexual as-

sault," said LaChance.

Tribal Council members Jon A. George, Chris Mercier, Denise Harvey, Tonya Gleason-Shepek and Ed Pearsall attended. Tribal Elder and longtime Tribal Council Chair Kathryn Harrison gave the invocation. Seven members of the Canoe Family drummed and sang.

Many members of the luncheon wore T-shirts that read "What is done by one is felt by all" and "Honor Our People."

"This is very much needed," said the Tribal Elder who remembers being punched in the face. "I'd like to see this ongoing. Speaking for my grandkids who are having problems, I feel their pain.

"I was married to an abusive husband for years. I didn't know there was help out there. Well, we grow from it." ■



Lorenz, executive director of Health Services for the Tribe and a SARRC member.

Lunch featured do-it-yourself sandwiches with chocolate fixings for dessert. Raffles were held.

At the front of the room, a number of luncheon participants spoke about their abuse experiences.

"You don't know what you'll come home to," one Tribal Elder said. For her, it had been a punch in the face. "I grew up hating my mom, but years later, I felt sorry for her. She had seen my grandmother do the same thing to her."

"It's important to bring it home," said Falla. "She is our reason for doing this. She is our strength."

The U.S. Department of Justice recently made domestic violence and sexual assault awareness for Tribal communities a priority, said



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