

Volunteers keep up with community needs

CLOTHES CLOSET continued from front page

Soderberg. “People are so thankful to go there and find what they need. I don’t know what the community would do without it.”

“We’re glad to be here and help out the community,” says Lori Walker-Hernandez, who has pitched in as a volunteer for eight years. “Community is what it is about: everybody helping everybody.”

Currently, the Clothes Closet is open two days a week – Monday and Friday, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Walker-Hernandez has Fridays and Daniele Powley, a volunteer since last September, has Mondays. For a long time, the Clothes Closet was open only one day a week.

“It’s a nice place to work,” says Walker-Hernandez. “It is not like you’re stressed. If you’re sick, you trade days.”

Volunteers keep up with what the community needs, and not just in clothes.

Powley was “kind of shy,” she says, the first time she needed clothes for her family. She did not know how the closet worked or what to expect, and if people would be looking at her.

Now, she says, “It’s fulfilling to meet people, do something for the community, and make people feel welcome. It’s nice to meet people and socialize.”

The Clothes Closet building is all cedar and the wood was cut by hand. So said the builder last summer to Walker-Hernandez when he came back to see if the old place was still standing.

He had a saw mill a little north on the property and built the house to live closer to work.

After he lived there, others have called the building home. In the early 1990s, the Tribal Head Start program used the building. For a time, rooms were rented out.

“A lot of people come down and say, ‘I used to go to school here,’ or ‘I used to live here,’ ” says Walk-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

The Clothes Closet is located on the Tribal campus near the rodeo grounds.

er-Hernandez.

Powley’s first experience came last year, before she started volunteering with the Clothes Closet. Her son, Benjamin, now 9, did not have shoes for school. “His school shoes wore out,” she says. The family was going to get him shoes with her husband’s latest paycheck. They were living paycheck to paycheck in those days.

Then, his paycheck was stolen, Powley says. “Things happen.”

She visited the Clothes Closet and found a pair. “I couldn’t believe that there was a pair that was perfect. People seem to find what they need there.”

For many years, Matt Bucknell, Elementary Lead for the Tribe’s Education Department, has spearheaded Socktoberfest, a program soliciting socks for the Clothes Closet. The community contributes hundreds of pairs every year.

This year, the Social Services Department collected jackets and coats for the Clothes Closet. They donated 160 this year.

“We’re like family,” says Walker-Hernandez. “The community really helps with donations. If a family is in need, the word goes out pretty quickly. People will call

and give blankets. If we don’t see somebody for a while, we’ll ask about them.”

The Clothes Closet has a bulletin board where community members can advertise to get rid of or find this or that. “It’s not just for Tribal members,” says Powley. “It’s for the whole community.”

The Clothes Closet serves about 25 to 30 people each Monday and Friday. The number has been growing every year, even if just by a couple of people in need.

Donations are currently down a

little, but the clothes on hand and the need for clothes also vary from week to week.

Men’s clothes are usually pretty scarce. “We’re always in need of men’s clothes,” says Walker-Hernandez.

When it comes to recycling, the Clothes Closet does its share. “We’re always recycling,” says Powley. Her daughter, Reanna, 6, will say, “Mommy, this doesn’t fit, let’s give it to some other girl.”

“We go through our stuff, our old coats, and bring them back,” Powley says.

Volunteers see it all – again and again. “We’ll say, ‘Hey, I’ve seen that outfit three or four times.’ ”

The Clothes Closet works with about five other similar agencies in the area. “One will call and say, ‘We have an overabundance of blankets. Do you need them?’ And we’ll do the same,” says Walker-Hernandez.

“I love doing it,” Walker-Hernandez adds. “If I got paid, I wouldn’t like it as well as I do. It’s not about the money. At some time, we’ve all needed help. What better way to give back than to help somebody else if you can?”

For questions, to donate or ask about clothes for the family, contact Walker-Hernandez at 559-847-7565 or Powley at 971-241-6170. ■

Five-year public safety levy will go to voters

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

The Polk County Board of Commissioners voted on Jan. 28 to place a five-year, 45 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value property tax levy on the May 19 ballot to raise funds to pay for public safety.

The proposal is supported by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

The commissioners voted on the levy after holding nine public hearings throughout the county, including one in Grand Ronde.

If approved, the levy would restore 22 employees to the Polk County Sheriff’s and District Attorney’s offices, and provide more resources to the Juvenile and Community Corrections departments.

Tribal Council Secretary Toby McClary attended two of the public hearings and read a statement from the Tribe.

“The Tribal government provides our own Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department and we are proud of our officers, our chief and our department. As such, we know firsthand the costs of operating this important public safety function and we are sensitive to the difficulties Polk County has in providing stable revenues for its law enforcement operations,” McClary said.

“Tribal Council supports the concept of Polk County providing new revenue for a rebuild of your law enforcement capacity. Your proposal to offer to voters a new

operating levy of an additional 45 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value for five years would provide a critically important boost to the Sheriff’s Office and county law enforcement. Our Tribe, the community of Grand Ronde and Polk County as a whole would benefit from the increased law enforcement and jail coverage that would result from this substantial new revenue.

“New tax levies are difficult. We encourage you to take the time to work with your constituents and not hurry to a new ballot. Education is a critical component to any new ballot measure. On behalf of the Tribal Council, we offer our assistance if we can be of help.”

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno read a similar statement at the Jan. 8 public hearing held in Grand Ronde.

For a \$200,000 home, the levy would cost a homeowner an additional \$90 a year in taxes. If the levy is approved, it would raise an additional \$2.25 million annually to fund public safety positions in the county.

Commissioner Jennifer Wheeler said that testimony during the hearings from people who called 911 and were told no deputies were available – because of budget cuts and reduced patrol hours – prompted her to place the levy on the May ballot instead of waiting until November. ■

Includes information from the Polk County Itemizer-Observer.

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