

Community Fund tops \$64 million in giving

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

The Grand Ronde Tribe's philanthropic arm, Spirit Mountain Community Fund, topped the \$64 million mark in giving on Wednesday, March 18, when it distributed 24 grants totaling \$704,413.

Since its formation in 1997, the Community Fund has distributed 2,141 grants worth \$64,647,236.10.

As part of the Tribe's gaming compact with the state of Oregon, the Community Fund receives 6 percent of profits from Spirit Mountain Casino and distributes the funds to charitable organizations in the categories of education, health, arts and culture, environment, historic preservation, public safety and problem gambling within an 11-county area of western Oregon.

Grant selection is made by the Spirit Mountain Community Fund Board of Trustees, which includes Tribal Council Chair Reyn Leno, Secretary Toby McClary and Tribal Council member Ed Pearsall.

The check distribution ceremony opened with Land and Culture Department employees Bobby Mercier, Brian Krehbiel and Travis Stewart, accompanied by Tina Lara and Kyoni Mercier, performing cultural drumming and singing.

Community Fund Director Kathleen George told attendees that the Grand Ronde Tribe appreciates partnering with their organizations to make western Oregon a better place to live. She added that 22 of the 24 organizations were previous grant recipients.

"Welcome back to many old friends and welcome to the Spirit Mountain Community Fund family to the new folks," George said. "It is a tremendous privilege for the Tribe and Spirit Mountain Community Fund to invest in your work and to empower your work. I want to thank you for being Oregon's community heroes."

McClary welcomed grant recipients to Grand Ronde.

"It is important for us to get people out past the casino to the Tribal headquarters to realize that we are



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

After being gifted a water bottle, Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George, left, talks with National Indian Child Welfare Association Executive Director Sarah Kastelic, middle, and Alexis Contreras, who provides project support at the nonprofit. Contreras is a Grand Ronde Tribal member.

more than a casino out here," McClary said. "We are a true government, a sovereign nation. ... It is a pleasure to give our money back to such generous and great nonprofits."

After attendees watched a video that recounted the Tribe's history and explained the Community Fund, checks were distributed by Pearsall and Spirit Mountain Casino Facilities Director Ron Reibach, who also sits on the fund's Board of Trustees, while Community Fund Program Coordinator Louis King read off the names.

Recipients of grants were:

- Children's Vision Foundation of Bend for its Seven-Step Vision Screening Project, \$5,000;
- Friends of Polk County CASA Inc. of Dallas for improving the numbers, training and satisfaction of its Court-Appointed Special Advocates volunteers, \$5,000;
- Phoenix Rising Transitions of Gresham for its housing project, \$5,000;
- Quilts From Caring Hands of Corvallis for providing at-risk children with colorful, comforting quilts, \$3,000;
- Albertina Kerr Centers Foundation Inc. of Portland for its children's mental health campus,

- \$75,000;
- Beaverton Education Foundation for Camp Achieve, which works to prevent the summer slide in low-income students, \$32,000;
- Centro Cultural of Washington County in Cornelius for its Sonrisa Children's Dental Program, \$35,000;
- Chess for Success of Portland for closing the achievement gap at 45 schools through after-school chess, \$30,000;
- Classroom Law Project of Portland for Project Citizen, which promotes responsible participation in civic life, \$5,000;
- Columbia Riverkeeper of Hood River for its reducing toxins project "Fish to Fork," \$25,000;
- Impact Northwest of Portland for its Thrive by Five! Project, \$50,000;
- Linn County CASA of Albany to recruit, train and retain court-appointed special advocates, \$17,820;
- National Indian Child Welfare Association of Portland for its Crisis Response project, \$50,000;
- Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides of Eugene for its Clean Water for Salmon project, \$48,670;
- Oregon CASA Network of Spring-

field for its CASA Sustainability in Oregon project, \$46,923;

- Oregon Council on Problem Gambling of Wilsonville for its adult gambling prevalence replication study, \$10,000;
- Oregon Foundation for Reproductive Health of Portland for its Healthy Women, Healthy Pregnancies, Healthy Babies project, \$35,000;
- Oregon Historical Society of Portland for its Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde digital records project, \$5,000;
- Pearl Buck Center of Eugene to support its preschool program, \$25,000;
- Polk County of Dallas for its Central Health and Wellness Center, \$80,000;
- Self Enhancement Inc. of Portland for its Core Program, which aims to close the achievement gap, \$25,000;
- The Friends of Creston Children's Dental Clinic of Portland for its capacity building project, \$21,000;
- Yamhill Carlton School District of Yamhill for its Healthy Kids Learn Better project, which will encourage students to utilize a school-based health center, \$20,000;
- And Youth Villages Inc. of Marylhurst for its Cedar Bough Native American Psychiatric Residential Treatment Program, \$50,000.

Also attending the check distribution from Tribal Council were Denise Harvey and Tonya Gleason-Shepek, as well as longtime Tribal Council Chair Kathryn Harrison.

The event wrapped up with the Community Fund honoring the spirit of potlatch even more by holding a drawing for three gifts. The Oregon Council on Problem Gambling received a framed painting of Mt. Hood, Columbia Riverkeeper won a decorative vase and the Oregon Foundation for Reproductive Health won a gift box from Made in Oregon.

Grant recipients also posed for photos with George and McClary taken by Tribal photographer Michelle Alaimo. ■

Smelt season

On Sunday, March 15, about 30 people from Grand Ronde traveled to Lewis and Clark State Park east of Troutdale for smelt dipping in the Sandy River. The Natural Resources Department provided dip nets and buckets, but unfortunately there were no smelt to catch. The smelt dipping season in Oregon was specified for only two days, with March 15 being the last of those days, between 6 a.m. and noon.

Tribal Elders, from left, Gladys Hobbs, Violet Folden and Guy Schultz watch some of the day's activity



from under the cover of a pop-up tent and the warmth of blankets during the gathering for smelt dipping at Lewis and Clark State Park on Sunday, March 15. The morning was rainy and chilly.



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Singing the "Salmon Song" before smelt dipping began, from left, are Tribal Council member Jon A. George and Land and Culture Department employees Travis Stewart, Bobby Mercier and Brian Krehbiel. Although there were no smelt running that day, Mercier said that it is always good to be in the area of ancestors' village sites.

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