

Highway 18 safety corridor status ends

By Nicole Montesano
Yamhill Valley News-Register

Nineteen years after establishing a safety corridor along a wreck-strewn stretch of Highway 18 between McMinnville and Grand Ronde, the Oregon Department of Transportation has decommissioned it.

At the time the corridor was established, in August 1996, the highway was one of the most notorious in the state for crashes resulting in deaths or serious injuries.

But ODOT announced in mid-March, "The average crash rate for the entire corridor has been below the statewide average for similar roads for the last five years and no longer qualifies under the program. As of March 31, all safety corridor signs will be taken down and the safety corridor designation will no longer be in effect."

The safety corridor was one of six remaining statewide. It ran from Fire Hall Road, west of Grand Ronde at milepost 20.7, to Southwest Sauter Road, west of McMinnville at milepost 38.4.

Most of the safety corridor was under the jurisdiction of either the Sheridan Fire District or Willamina's West Valley Fire District.

West Valley Public Information Officer Connie Crawford Lain said her district doesn't believe the decommissioning will make a significant difference. The concrete median barriers installed by the state to prevent drivers from crossing into oncoming traffic, she said, were the most significant factor in reducing the mayhem.

"We have seen a huge decrease in fatalities since they put the barricade up," she said. "It has made an amazing difference. We just are not seeing the horrific fatalities we were before the barricade went up. Calling it a safety corridor, we're kind of ambivalent about because to us the major improvement has been that barrier."

However, she said the department is hoping the state will now turn its attention to two other problem areas – Wallace Bridge and the highway's intersection with Grand Ronde Road.

"We are still seeing significant, serious accidents in those spots," she said.

According to ODOT, the local corridor is the 14th decommissioning since the program began in 1989. Safety corridors are decommissioned when the fatal and serious

injury crash rate is reduced to the statewide average or below for similar roadways.

"This is good news for motorists," said Nicole Charlson, a traffic safety coordinator with ODOT. "Traffic safety has improved significantly on that stretch of highway."

Charlson said ODOT has worked closely with Polk and Yamhill counties, Spirit Mountain Casino, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, area citizens and other jurisdictions to make the corridor safer over the years. She said increased police enforcement, engineering and construction improvements and increased public awareness all played a role.

The Tribe covered the \$2.5 million cost of a grade-separated intersection at Spirit Mountain Casino. The state installed centerline rumble

strips to reduce crossover and side-swipe crashes, developed a new Fort Hill interchange, added concrete median barriers along a stretch at Fort Hill, redesigned the intersection at Red Prairie Road, created a number of new no-passing zones and provided additional signage.

"It has been our experience that fatal and serious injury crash rates do not increase after a safety corridor is decommissioned," Charlson said, adding that ODOT is planning additional physical upgrades, including addition of a left-turn refuge at Christiansen Road and closure of the western connection to Caleb Payne Road. ■

A longer version of this story appeared in the March 20 Yamhill County News-Register. Reprinted with permission.

Housing installs stop signs, changes speed limit

The Grand Ronde Housing Department has installed two new stop signs near the welcome center, as well as changed the speed limit in Tribal housing from 35 mph to 25 mph.

For more information, contact Homeownership Coordinator Vicki Jones at 503-879-1465. ■

GRAND RONDE GAMING COMMISSION POSITIONS

The Grand Ronde Gaming Commission is seeking applications to fill one commission position starting June 2015 and expiring June 2018. The Tribal Gaming Ordinance requires this position to be filled by a Tribal member.

The Grand Ronde Gaming Commission regulates all gaming-related activities associated with Spirit Mountain Casino.

Applicants must be at least 21 years of age. Commissioners may not hold elective or managerial Tribal positions, and may not be employed in or own any interest in or gamble in a gaming operation authorized by the Tribal Gaming Ordinance. Commissioners are independent contractors and expend approximately 30-40 hours per month to fulfill their responsibilities. The commission generally meets on the second and third Fridays of each month. Appointment is contingent upon successful completion of a background investigation.

Applications may be obtained by calling Kathy Doane at 503-879-2393 or by e-mail at kathy.doane@grandronde.org.

Closing date is April 30, 2015, at 5 p.m. For more information about the Gaming Commission, please visit our webpage at www.grandrondegaming.org. ■

Meet & Greet

Sponsored by the Tribal Social Services and Health committees

Monday, April 27
11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Elders Activity Center, 48940 Blacktail Drive

You are invited to meet with our health care providers and representatives of the Sexual Assault Response Resource Circle

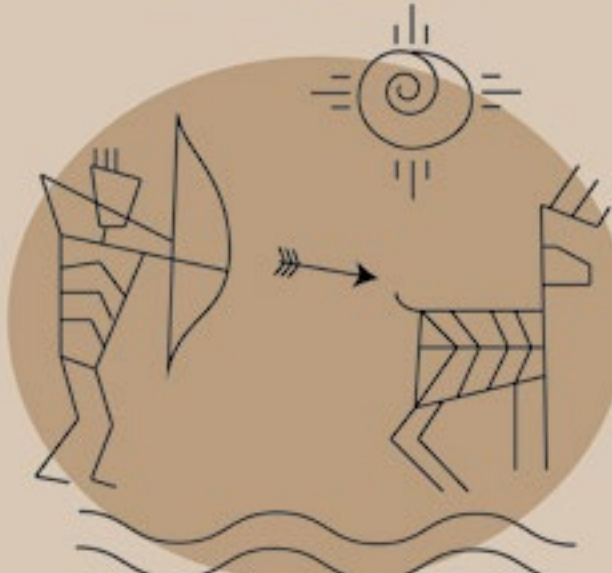
Light lunch will be provided; door prizes, too

For more information: Contact Jamie Adams at Health & Wellness at 503-879-5086

FIRST FOODS CELEBRATION

APRIL 25, 2015
10:30 AM - CLOSING PRAYER

HOSTED BY THE
CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF GRAND RONDE
CULTURE COMMITTEE



CHACHALU
8720 GRAND RONDE ROAD

FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR TO BRING FOOD,
CONTACT SARAH ROSS AT 503-879-2006.