

Meeting seeks community input

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

A potential swimming pool was the hot topic at the annual Community Input meeting held on Wednesday, June 3, in the Tribal gym.

"We had 18 Tribal departments represented here tonight," said Planning and Grants Development Manager Kim Rogers. "This event is offered as an opportunity for members to provide comments and suggestions that will be used to help guide Tribal programs and prepare grant applications."

Tribal staff members filled the gym at 15 information tables and gathered input from Tribal members. Members stopped by each table and in exchange for filling out comment cards they were awarded passports, which were collected and used to determine raffle winners.

Attendance included 41 Tribal members and 40 people from Tribal Council and Tribal staff.

Rogers said all the information gathered will be summarized into a report for Tribal Council.

"It helps inform us on possible things we should be looking into as possible projects," Rogers said.

Many Tribal members have expressed an ongoing interest in having a swimming pool built in Grand Ronde for the membership and community.

Tribal member Rex Haller has been a pool proponent and he spent time with Tribal Planner Rick George at the meeting. George said the project has been talked about for a few years and that it



Photo by Brent Merrill

Tribal Elder Violet Folden fills out an information sheet for Tribal Employment Rights Office Secretary Keri Kimsey at the annual Community Input meeting held on Wednesday, June 3, in the Tribal gym. The Community Input meeting is an annual gathering for Tribal membership to share their ideas on the direction Tribal programs should take in the future. This year's meeting featured a dinner served by Tribal Council members.

has picked up momentum recently.

"It has been brought up repeatedly by Tribal members during the last six months at General Council meetings and Tribal Council meetings," George said. "That resulted in Tribal Council picking that issue up and making a decision to study it and figure out what it would cost, and figure out whether it's fundable and whether or not the Tribe would want to make a policy decision to construct it and operate it."

George said Tribal Council directed the General Manager's Office to determine how much it would cost and to bring the results of that study into the budget process. How

soon the project hits the budgeting process has to do with how long the study will take.

"So that's where we are," said George. "We're getting ready to do the study. We are just at the beginning."

George said on a scale of one to five, the pool proposal is at one.

"We haven't looked at the size or the components," said George. "Are we looking at a water park with a kid's play area, a wading pool or a therapy pool?" said George. "None of that has been decided yet. There is not even a threshold or boundaries for a potential cost. It's all in the planning, theorative stages right

now."

George gives the membership an "A" for their efforts so far.

"I think the Tribal membership is doing exactly what they are supposed to do as members of the Confederated Tribes that is represented by an elective government," said George. "What they are saying is, 'In this community this is a priority and this is something we think should be studied.'"

George said he thinks Community Input meetings are a good process for gathering information from the membership. He said a broader survey will be sent to the membership in July that gathers information about members' socio-economic situations. He said the survey is sent out to the membership every five years.

George and Rogers said that listening to the community and its hopes and dreams is important to leadership at every level of the Tribe.

"I think community input is fundamentally important to governance," said George. "It is the linkage between the people and the people they put into office. It's vitally important."

Rogers said attendance at Tribal leadership is very important to the process.

"Thank you to the Tribal Council for approving the meeting and attending it," said Rogers. "Thank you to the Education Department for sharing their meeting date with ours and thank you to (Nutrition Program Manager) Kristy DeLoe for the meal." ■

All veterans encouraged to attend

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characteristics. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 22 veterans take their own lives each day based on death records from 21 states.

Social Services Department Manager Dave Fullerton said it's those veterans that the summit tries to reach.

"The whole philosophy of why we started this was really trying to reach people that aren't being served," said Fullerton. "The reality is we needed to do something, so we did it."

According to Indian Health Service statistics released in 2012, there is a 72 percent higher rate of suicide among Native Americans. In addition, of the 38,000 Americans who die from suicide each year, 90 percent suffer from a mental disorder, a substance abuse disorder or both.

"I think originally when we talked about doing the summit we were definitely targeting the veteran out there that is homeless, the one that doesn't reach out," said Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno. "We can make a difference and we can make that connection for them so they can get the help they need and have a right to. My real belief

is that the best way to help a veteran is to get another veteran to make the communication and the connection that will get them to go and get their help."

Fullerton said the summit's first year in 2013 was very grass roots.

"We didn't have a budget so we just came up with the money, we just did everything ourselves," said Fullerton. "We paid for everything. Then the next year the council liked what we were doing and they gave us a budget. We are trying to reach out to the homeless veterans. We want to serve the people that aren't being served. We're trying to connect people with benefits and at the same time honor veterans."

Fullerton said the event aims to be more family friendly this year with arts and crafts, attractions for children and a family fun walk.

"We want the veterans to bring their families," said Fullerton. "The attendance has started small and grown, and like any event will continue to grow."

A "Listening Session" is scheduled for 3 to 5 p.m. Thursday, July 9, at the Tribal Community Center to start the summit. The session will discuss the Grand Ronde Tribe's memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that allows the Health & Wellness Center to be

reimbursed for caring for veterans – Tribal and nonTribal. The idea is that veterans who live in rural areas far from Veterans Affairs' hospitals can be better served by Tribal health clinics.

All of the summit's workshops and focus groups will be held under the Tribe's new arbor at the pow-wow grounds starting with a reception at 6 p.m. Thursday followed by a plankhouse ceremony at 8 p.m.

Tribal employee Nick Sixkiller will emcee the summit on Friday. Navajo code talker and World War II veteran Peter MacDonald Sr., Eagle Staff carrier Linda Woods (Ojibwe) and retired Staff Sgt. Rebecca Stone will be the keynote speakers.

MacDonald is the only four-term chairman of the Navajo Nation and served in the Marine Corps.

"I would call him down to earth," said Leno. "People really acknowledge his words when he is speaking. He is a speaker that talks a lot about his fellow code talkers and

his people; he's not really talking a lot about himself."

Woods is an Air Force veteran from 1962-66 who received an honorable discharge and is part of a group known as the Women of Wellbriety International. She is part of the group's Grandmother's Council.

Stone, who will be traveling to Oregon from Maryland, served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and is a certified suicide negotiator/first responder. She also is a recipient of the National Association of Female Executives' Women of Excellence Award.

Leno said he hopes the Veterans Summit will assist the people who deserve the help and need it most.

"If you get one veteran to go to the hospital, if you get one veteran to live a year longer than they were going to then you call it a success," said Leno. "It's about making a difference in one person's life."

"We want to encourage any and all veterans to come out," said Fullerton. ■

Elders' phone numbers wanted

The Tribal Elders Committee is compiling a volunteer phone list of Elders. If you would like to submit your phone number and address to be available to other Elders, send it to elders.committee@grandronde.org or leave a message at 503-879-2231. ■