

Vocational Rehabilitation seeks to help people

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

If you are a Grand Ronde Tribal member living in Marion, Polk, Yamhill, Tillamook, Clackamas, Multnomah or Washington counties and are looking for employment, don't overlook the Tribe's Vocational Rehabilitation Program as a resource.

Although some might attach negative connotations to the program's name or feel they that they do not have a "disability," Vocational Rehabilitation offers a Tribal member numerous avenues of assistance in gaining and retaining employment.

"We are here for any Tribal member seeking employment and seeking to become self-sufficient," says Employment and Training Specialist Khani Schultz. "Vocational Rehabilitation is intended for anybody who needs services in obtaining employment and training."

In 2014, the program helped 263 Tribal members.

How does one get started?

First step is to call Vocational Rehabilitation/477 Supervisor Michael Herrin at 503-879-4543 for a friendly conversation, Schultz says.

From that conversation, if a Tribal member is deemed as a person who qualifies for help, then the Tribal member will fill out an intake application and undergo an assessment evaluation that will help Vocational Rehabilitation employees determine what kind of training and/or on-the-job education is needed.

For instance, Schultz says, if a Tribal member had back surgery

and can no longer return to work as a laborer on construction projects, Vocational Rehabilitation would help train them for and obtain a new job.

Or if a Tribal student is transitioning out of high school and wants to start a career instead of attending a post-secondary institution, Vocational Rehabilitation can help.

"What is it that you want to do?" Schultz says about clients. "VR is a process of helping people help themselves."

Vocational Rehabilitation can help Tribal members take basic computer classes so that they feel more comfortable tackling online computer applications like the one used at Spirit Mountain Casino.

Vocational Rehabilitation also helps Tribal members get "booted and suited" – obtain the proper clothing for jobs they have been hired to perform.

Schultz says that Vocational Rehabilitation staff members are held to the same confidentiality standards as health workers. "Everything is confidential," she says.

Vocational Rehabilitation also works with many partners, from the state Employment Office to numerous Tribal departments – the Tribal Employment Rights Office, Human Resources, Education, Housing, Transitional Housing, the Community Garden, the Grand Ronde Food Bank, Grand Ronde Food and Fuel, Finance, Procurement and Behavioral Health.

In particular, Schultz cites the Finance Department and Kelly



Contributed photo

Employment and Training Specialist Khani Schultz says that Finance Department employees, such as, from left, Accounts Payable Specialist Tammy Chavez, Budget/Grant Coordinator Nancy Renfrow, Account Specialist Darla Patterson and Accounts Payable Specialist Nicole Teeter, are indispensable in helping the Vocational Rehabilitation/477 Program help Tribal members in obtaining work, especially in expeditiously processing check requests to purchase appropriate work clothing.

Herber in Procurement – "They rock our world," she says – because staff members often are asked to process purchase orders and check requests on short notice to help Tribal members obtain needed supplies, such as work boots.

"Without them, we can't get services done for our people and that is what it is all about," Schultz says. "Interdepartmental cooperation is vital. We are always out there looking for partners."

Vocational Rehabilitation also can help Tribal members who are receiving Social Security disability or supplemental security income but want to return to work.

"Just call," Schultz adds. "Our goal is to have eligible Tribal members with disabilities gain and retain employment. The desired outcome will be independent, self-sufficient, productive participants in the community."

Vocational Rehabilitation employees also staff the Portland Area Office, 4445 S.W. Barbur Blvd., on a weekly basis to help Tribal members in the metropolitan area.

The Vocational Rehabilitation staff also includes Employment & Training Specialist Pearl Rife, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Dodie McKenzie and 477/VR trainee Chris Martin. ■

Policy now in place for vote

**FLAG continued
from front page**

Umatilla Tribal flag hanging in the high school gym. She sent an e-mail to Forster, requesting that the school district hang the Grand Ronde Tribal flag since about a third of district students identify as Native American.

Forster placed it on the School Board's April agenda, but it was pulled from the "action item" list by Board President Craig Johnson, who suggested the Tribe pay \$25,000 to hang the flag for five years.

At a tense May School Board meeting attended by more than 100 people, Tribal and community members were allotted slightly more than 40 minutes to testify regarding Fasana's request. No one spoke in opposition to hanging the Tribal flag, but the School Board did not comment or take action on the proposal, leaving many in the audience frustrated and dismayed.

The ensuing controversy prompted Fasana, who had been the Tribal liaison to the School Board for eight years, to mount a last-minute write-in campaign for School Board

that received more than 40 votes in the May 19 election.

Forster said the revised policy was sent to School Board members during its development and only one comment was received, which was incorporated into the final policy. "They didn't say 'no' to it," he said.

Forster said he also consulted with Winston Cornwall, a Civil Rights Education specialist with the state Department of Education, and with Betsy Miller-Jones, executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association, as well as his administrative team in the development of the policy.

He met with principals Tim France and Carrie Zimbrick, who will succeed him as district superintendent in July, and developed a policy that will hopefully address concerns on both sides and still gain support from a majority of board members.

"The board is now in a position to vote," Forster said. "They wanted a policy in place. I think this is one that meets their expectations."

Cornwall said the state Education Department's legal staff reviewed the proposed policy. "We have not seen the revised policy,"

he said, to determine if the district utilized input from the state.

Cornwall and Education Department Indian Education Specialist April Campbell, who is a Grand Ronde Tribal member and former head of the Tribe's Education Department, became involved in the controversy after the April School Board meeting.

"I was invited to attend a board work session," Cornwall said. "When I attended the work session, I shared that I thought the request to have the Tribal flag be placed in the gym was very reasonable."

Cornwall cited both the Pendleton and Jefferson County school districts, which honored similar requests to hang the Umatilla and Warm Springs Tribal flags, respectively, without the request reaching the board level or requiring a policy.

"I shared that I had witnessed the benefit of the flags and that relationship firsthand. I encouraged the board to speak with the superintendents and, if they wanted to, to speak with the board members," Cornwall said. "The requests in those communities were received as a way to foster cooperation and represent as many of the population of

those school districts as possible in the most appropriate manner."

Cornwall, who attended the May School Board meeting, said he also will attend the June 23 meeting to see the issue to its hopeful conclusion.

"It's a complex situation for the board members of this district," Cornwall said. "I'm not a board member and I am not a representative of the community. I am more interested in the outcome and response based on how the board's output has been received. I will be observing and supporting this process through its conclusion."

Johnson did not return a phone call from *Smoke Signals* seeking comment on the proposed flag policy.

After adoption of the revised policy, the School Board is scheduled to vote on Fasana's original request without the Grand Ronde Tribe having to make an official request to the School District, Forster said.

Other board members are Clinton Coblenz, Dan Heidt, Linda O'Neil and Ken Onstot. The board will meet at 7 p.m. Tuesday, June 23, in the school library on the Oaken Hills campus. ■