

# Meeting explains new charnel house

By Brent Merrill

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

Tribal Historic Preservation Office Program Manager David Harrelson hosted a meeting about plans for a new charnel house on Wednesday, July 15, in the Tribal Community Center.

Harrelson used the 90-minute meeting to explain the difference between the planned charnel house at the Tribal Cemetery and a mausoleum.

Harrelson was joined by Engineering and Public Works Manager Jesse White and Facilities Maintenance Supervisor Tyson Mercier for his presentation to a small, but interested audience.

Harrelson said that he handles repatriations of objects and remains returned to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. His office is the contact point for inadvertent discoveries of ancestral remains in Tribal homelands.

He said it is these types of ongoing discoveries that prompted the need for a charnel house and not a mausoleum.

"A number of years ago our office

came forward with a need to have a place to keep ancestral remains that we get back before they go back into the ground," said Harrelson. "We need a place to keep them that isn't someone's office, some place that isn't a storage facility and not a museum. It needs to be a place that isn't regularly occupied by people."

Harrelson said the need comes from traditional beliefs of not being around the dead or spending time around their objects.

"A lot of traditional beliefs are that if that happens you can catch sickness from these things," said Harrelson. "That has been a challenge that Elders have expressed to us. We don't want bones in our museum and I can say right now that we do not have bones in our museum."

Harrelson said remains currently in possession of the Tribal Historic Preservation Office are stored in an undisclosed location away from the museum complex.

"It's not really a place of respect or honor like we would like it to be," said Harrelson. "That is why we are proposing the charnel house. Previously, people had been referring to it

as a mausoleum when it was first introduced as an idea, but the purpose was to be a small structure where repatriated remains can be held until they can be reburied. A mausoleum for people leads to them thinking of where you place urns and you go to the cemetery and you see that. That is not what this structure will be."

Harrelson said that the origins of the term comes from when early explorers like Capt. Meriwether Lewis and 2nd Lt. William Clark traveled through the area and discovered the burial islands of the Multnomah people and the Cascade Indians on the Columbia River. Remains were placed in house-like structures that were described as charnel houses.

"A lot of the objects that we end up repatriating from museums are originally from those islands," said Harrelson. "That's why we wanted to call it a charnel house because it's a place for those types of things. We have a custom and a tradition of our ancestral people, before they came to Grand Ronde, of having structures like that."

Harrelson said remains and burial objects come in piecemeal. He said that if an entire set of remains were to come to the Tribe all at once it would simply be reburied as per custom, but that those occurrences are extremely rare and never happened in his career.

"The need for the charnel house is that sometimes our ancestors come

home a bone at a time. I do want to emphasize that the Tribe's preference is always to keep the bones where they are if that can happen," said Harrelson. "We will make every effort to re-bury at the location where those objects or remains are discovered. They belong there."

Sometimes reburial at the site of an inadvertent discovery is impossible, Harrelson said. If an object has already been disturbed and turned into a Sheriff's Office, then those objects once recovered will be repatriated to Grand Ronde after being identified as belonging to the Tribe.

White said groundbreaking on the charnel house is scheduled for late summer and construction should take about four weeks to complete.

Tribal Council member Tonya Gleason-Shepek asked if Harrelson thought there might be an increase in recovered remains and objects in years to come.

"I'm expecting a lot more inadvertent discoveries with the dry weather and the lowering of water levels," Harrelson said. "Lower reservoirs will and have resulted in things being exposed that weren't previously exposed."

"With population growth in western Oregon over the next 25 years, there is going to be a lot of development and as a result of development we have a greater likelihood to see things happen in our area." ■

## 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. ■

## 2015 FISH & WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

# ELDERS FISHING TRIP

### SEPT. 24, 2015

### 9 A.M. - 5 P.M.

The F& W Committee extends an invitation to ALL ELDERS to join in for a day filled with fun and fishing! Annual event held at Henry Hagg Lake.

**YOUR TRIBAL FISHING LICENSE IS REQUIRED!**

No state fishing license is needed, but you will need a Tribal fishing license to fish  
No fee to attend and the opportunity to fish from both land and boat will be available

**NEED YOUR TRIBAL FISHING LICENSE?**  
Contact: Natural Resources Division 503-879-2424

**RAIN OR SHINE EVENT! DRESS APPROPRIATELY**

- Transportation, fishing gear & meal provided
- The trip is limited to the first 25 Tribal Elders and spouses who sign up at the Elders Activity Center or by calling 503-879-2233
- We encourage those riding in the vans to please arrive by 7:45 a.m. to load the vans and leave at 8 a.m.
- Join us even if you don't fish but would like to attend to enjoy the view and outing.

**Sign up sheet at the Elder Activity Center 503-879-2233**


