

# Community Fund tops \$67 million in giving

By Brent Merrill

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

Spirit Mountain Community Fund hosted its third-quarter grant distribution on Wednesday, Sept. 16, in a new location at Chachalu Museum & Cultural Center in Grand Ronde.

During the ceremony, the fund distributed 43 grants totaling more than \$1.8 million. The smallest grant was \$2,500 to the Open Hearts Open Minds Coffee Creek Theater Arts Program and the largest grant of \$322,500 was awarded to the Grand Ronde Tribal Police Project.

In all, the fund distributed 25 large grants and 11 small grants. The fund distributes grants to Oregon Tribes annually and those awards are distributed during each year's third-quarter presentation.

Since its inception in 1997, the fund has awarded 2,214 grants totaling more than \$67 million.

Tribal member Kathleen George, the Community Fund's director, welcomed grant recipients to Chachalu following a drum song by Tribal artisans Travis Stewart and Brian Krehbiel.

"It's the opportunity to welcome our partners to Grand Ronde and take a moment to celebrate together the work of your organizations, the grassroots work that makes this state a better place to live," said George.

Tribal Council members Denise Harvey, Ed Pearsall and Brenda Tuomi and Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno attended, as well as the fund's Board of Trustees Chairman Sho Dozono, board member and Tribal member Ron Reibach and the fund's Grants Coordinator Julia Willis.

"We are tremendously excited to renew our support for your work," George said. "One of the most important things I get to do today in addition to sharing the grants is also to share with you our very, very sincere and strong heartfelt thanks for the work that you do. I am so pleased to be a part of the fund. We consider it an honor and a privilege to support the work that you do."

Leno said he is proud of the Tribe's Community Fund.

"It was the idea of our council since Restoration in 1983," said Leno. "This community took care of us so we want to take care of the community. That's what the whole fund is based on and it's been highly successful. We love to see what you do. We love to have you come here and see what we do. We really like to have people know who we are and we are glad to be able to help you."

Dozono, who has been on the fund's Board of Trustees since the beginning, thanked the Tribe for its generosity and said he has felt privileged to be a part of the giving for the last 18 years.

"This is the best job I have ever had. It has been an amazing experience for me," said Dozono. "It's been a wonderful experience."

The first grant of the day for \$5,000 was awarded to Antonio



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George talks with grant recipients during the fund's third-quarter check presentation held at Chachalu Museum & Cultural Center on Wednesday, Sept. 16.**

Jackson, executive director of Building Blocks to Success, for the LEGO Robotics program.

Building Blocks is a nonprofit organization based in Multnomah County that exposes youths to science, technology, engineering and math through LEGOs and robots.

"We are really empowering kids and inspiring them that they can be anything they want to be and the only limits they have are the limits they place on themselves," said Jackson.

Jackson said his program has more than 80 youths ages 6 to 14 who attend Saturday morning sessions on the campus of Concordia University in northeast Portland.

"We are setting the expectation that college is a reality for them and college is where we expect them to go," said Jackson. "The little ones – we are telling them that they are college students."

George said it is no accident that the children attend sessions at a university.

"They are taking these young, underserved kids, most of them are coming from families that didn't have the opportunity to go to college, and they are working on LEGO robotics," said George. "They are saying to these kids, 'This is a place for you where you belong' so that long before they think about whether or not they are going to college, it's a place where they belong. I think that is a powerful message."

Jackson said the grant money will be used to purchase more computers and more robots.

"This grant has helped us tremendously," he said.

One of the large grant recipients of \$20,000 was the McMinnville School District's Jumpstart – Ready for Kindergarten Program.

Jumpstart is a national early education organization that recruits people, usually former teachers or community volunteers, to serve preschool children in low-income neighborhoods. The program curriculum helps children develop language and literacy skills that children need to be better prepared for kindergarten and to close the literacy gap at a young age.

The program is in its fifth year educating parents with young

children. The program reports that children participating in its before-school-age reading program have measurably better success than children who are not read to.

The school district provides reading kits with binders that help parents track their reading activities and the progress their children are making.

"It's tremendous," said McMinnville School District Administrative Assistant Mary Dressel of the grant dollars. "As a school district we couldn't prioritize that many kits for that many families. We try to reach out to needy families."

Dressel said the binders cost \$22 and the kits cost \$60 for each family, and that the award from Spirit Mountain Community Fund covers that cost.

Clackamas Community College Foundation received a grant for \$25,000 to fund the school's restoration of the headwaters of Newell Creek project located at the John Inskeep Environmental Learning Center. Newell Creek eventually flows into the Willamette River.

"In the late 1950s, Smuckers Corporation occupied a piece of property that has now become a part of the college and was traditionally the headwaters of Newell Creek," said Clackamas Community College Foundation's Executive Director Greg Fitzgerald. "At that time, the corporation dug a channel so that they could drain their property and we are restoring it back into a flowing stream bed."

Fitzgerald said the area is home to two listed fish species – Coho and steelhead – and that it is a traditional spawning area.

Fitzgerald said that with the resources of the college, its consortium of partners and the funding from Spirit Mountain Community Fund, the area will be transformed.

"We are going to be able to make sure that the storm water runoff that now flows on to our campus through this particular area will be cleaner going out than it is coming in so that we can protect the salmon and steelhead habitat," said Fitzgerald. "This grant has helped us produce a fantastic design that also provides this five-acre place with an outdoor classroom and educational

facilities not just for the community college students, but for all K-12 children in the area."

George said the project stood out because it is a "melding" of the college's educational mission with its ability to be good land stewards.

"We have been looking for more and more opportunities to invest in habitat restoration for our rivers and our watersheds, so this seemed like a great opportunity," said George. "We just thought this was a really exciting project."

The Newell Creek restoration project is scheduled to be completed in 2017.

Jonathan Jelen of Oregon Wild attended and received the \$25,000 grant award for his organization.

Jelen, who is Oregon Wild's development coordinator, said the grant award is a "game changer."

Jelen said the organization's mission is to protect and restore Oregon's wild lands, wildlife and waters "as an enduring legacy for future generations."

Oregon Wild was founded in 1974 and focuses on protecting old growth forests and working to get wilderness areas designated for protection and then seeing to it that they are actually protected. Oregon Wild works to protect gray wolf and salmon populations and sea otters as well.

Jelen said his organization is working to strengthen Oregon's laws regarding aerial pesticide spraying. He said the laws regulating spraying chemicals are "weak" and Oregon Wild wants to work with the state to do something about it. He said the grant from Spirit Mountain Community Fund will allow Oregon Wild to bring on new staff to work specifically on strengthening regulations around aerial pesticide spraying.

"I think they (Oregon Wild) have picked an issue that I think needs some work and they are going to do it in partnership with the state so that was one of the things that we were happy to support," said George.

Maybe the most important grant for the third quarter was the \$25,000 awarded to Store to Door of Multnomah County.

Store to Door is a volunteer-based, grassroots shopping and delivery service for shut-in Elders.

"It's a population that goes pretty much unseen," said Executive Director Kiersten Ware. "The homebound are people that have worked their whole lives, raised families and contributed to their society."

Ware, whose organization was established in 1989, said the average age of clients is 76 and that 84 percent are women. She said 80 percent of their clients live alone and that most have outlived their spouses and many times have outlived their children.

Ware said most of their clients want to remain in their homes and not be placed in care facilities.

"They want to remain living in their own setting – it's a tie to

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