

General Council briefed on Community Fund

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George provided the membership with an update on the Tribe's philanthropic entity at the Sunday, Oct. 4, General Council meeting held in the Community Center.

Since the Community Fund's inception in 1997, the Grand Ronde Tribe has donated 6 percent of Spirit Mountain Casino profits – more than \$67 million at this juncture – to fund charitable organizations in 11 northwestern Oregon counties, as well as the nine federally recognized Tribes in the state.

In 18 years, the Community Fund has distributed 2,214 grants.

“Not only is this a wise, generous thing for the Tribe to do, but it is also consistent with our culture of giving, our culture of taking care of the less fortunate,” George said.

The Community Fund was created to counter proposals in the late 1990s that Tribal casino profits should be taxed by the state. Its creation and operating guidelines are included in the Tribe's gaming compact signed with the state in January 1997.

“Our council at the time did see the wisdom of working with the governor to create an agreement that would, number one, allow our casino to grow, to continue to produce more revenue for the Tribe, but also would be a good response to those people who thought that some of that revenue should be coming back to the state,” George said.

The Community Fund distributes grants in the areas of arts and culture, education, health, historic preservation, public safety, environmental preservation and fighting problem gaming.

George said that about a third of all grants have been in the two areas of health and education.

The Community Fund is overseen by an eight-member Board of Trustees, which includes three Tribal Council members. Current-



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George briefs the membership on the Tribe's philanthropic entity during the General Council meeting held Sunday, Oct. 4, at the Tribal Community Center.

ly serving on the board are Tribal Council Chair Reyn Leno, Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr. and Tribal Council member Ed Pearsall.

Current health-related funding priorities, George said, include healthy mothers and children, oral health, and healthy diets and lifestyles.

Education priorities include getting children ready for school with early reading programs and environmental priorities focus on river health, environmental justice, fish restoration and reducing toxic pollution in Oregon waterways.

The Community Fund's Tribal Grants Program awards funds to the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon, which are traditionally underserved by the philanthropic community. George said Tribal grant decisions are made by the non-Tribal members of the Board of Trustees to ensure no conflict of interest.

“We put at least \$500,000 a year aside for Tribal awards,” George said. “It's our only set aside in the fund. ... We're very proud of it.”

The Community Fund also allocated \$322,500 to the Grand Ronde Police Department this year, which was not part of the normal competitive process with nonprofits or other Tribes, George said. Previously, the Community Fund had awarded money to the Polk County Sheriff's Office to pay for additional coverage in the Grand Ronde area, but now that the Tribe has its own police force, the funding is going to the Tribe.

The Community Fund also operates the Hatfield Fellowship, which sends a deserving Native American from Oregon, Washington, Idaho or Montana to Washington, D.C., to work in the office of an Oregon congressional delegation member for nine months. The current Hatfield Fellow is Maria Givens of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe.

George said the good work done by the Community Fund, in addition to the connections made by

having people serve on the Board of Trustees – Oregon Gov. Kate Brown served on the board from inception until she became governor earlier this year – are invaluable to the Tribe.

Brown's successor is Val Hoyle, a Democratic representative from the Eugene area. “We were very pleased to get Val,” George said. “I think she will be a great voice for the fund.”

After her presentation, George fielded eight comments and questions.

Before George's presentation, a 70-minute Financial Report was presented to Tribal members only. The report was delivered in executive session, which limits how much *Smoke Signals* can report on the meeting.

A recording of the Financial Report was made and Tribal members who did not attend can request a copy by contacting Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin at 503-879-2304 or stacia.martin@grandronde.org. Tribal Council has waived the usual \$5 fee to obtain a copy of the meeting.

In other action, it was announced that the next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 1, in the Community Center to review the preliminary 2016 Tribal budget.

Tribal Elders Alton Butler and Julie Duncan and Tribal spouse Bob Duncan won the \$50 door prizes and Tribal Elder Wink Soderberg won the \$100 door prize.

In addition, two necklaces donated by Tribal Council member Jon A. George and canned food items donated by Veronica Gaston were raffled off.

The video of the regular meeting can be viewed in its entirety at the Tribal website, www.grandronde.org, by clicking on the News tab and then Video. ■

Board seeking younger veteran help

The Tribal Veterans Special Event Board is to recruiting younger veterans – Iraqi and Afghanistan veterans – to join.

“Our committee is getting older,” said Veterans SEB Chairman Steve Bobb Sr., who is a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran.

Members of the SEB attend events as flag carriers and represent the Tribe, as well as their branch of service.

Veterans interested in volunteering should contact Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin at 503-879-2304 or stacia.martin@grandronde.org. ■

Speakers announced for convention

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, Office of Hawaiian Affairs Chief Executive Officer Dr. Kamana'opono Crabbe and Pacific Northwest photographer Matika Wilbur will be keynote speakers at the 46th annual National Indian Education Association Convention and Trade Show set for Oct. 14-17 in Portland.

The trio will discuss the changing educational landscape of Native communities and how the Education Association and its members continue to work collaboratively to strengthen relationships and educational priorities to foster the next generation.

The Education Association was founded by Native educators in 1969 with the mission of advancing comprehensive educational opportunities for all American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students.

For more information about the Education Association and to inquire about attending the convention as a member, sponsor or tradeshow exhibitor, visit www.niea.org on the Internet. ■

Thank You!

The sponsoring Tribes of the Gathering of Oregon's First Nations event in Salem have decided to discontinue the January Powwow. We want to thank everyone who helped make our event a success. Thank you for 7 wonderful years of support!






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