

# Luncheon continues awareness effort

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

The third annual Renewing Spirits luncheon held on Monday, Oct. 19, at the Elders Activity Center continued an effort to bring awareness of assault and sexual assault to the Grand Ronde Tribal community.

The message was clear and the reality stark – one in three Native American women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetimes and three in five Native women will be physically assaulted in a domestic relationship.

The turnout for the event was large. Presenter Lisa Norton, executive director of My Sisters' Place in Lincoln City, spoke to an audience of more than 200 people – mostly Grand Ronde Tribal Elders.

In the audience were Tribal Council members Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Denise Harvey, Brenda Tuomi and Jon A. George. Also in attendance were the staff members who put on the luncheon – Jamie Adams and Anne Falla and Assistant General Manager Dawn Doar.

They were joined by Shawna Ridgebear, Mychal Cherry and Angey Rideout from Spirit Mountain Casino.

"This is our third annual Renewing Spirits luncheon," said Adams. "And we are pretty proud of that."

Adams began the luncheon by sharing a story that motivated her to create the event. She said she had attended a training session on domestic violence and sexual assault in Indian Country. She said she felt she had to do something, but was unsure of her next step.

The following Sunday was the Tribe's General Council meeting in Grand Ronde. Tribal Elder Val Grout said to the membership that if you have a good idea and you didn't speak up, it was on you.

"I left that meeting with those words embedded in my heart," said Adams.

Adams said she had a moment of "clarity" after Grout spoke and she applied for a grant from the Northwest Indian Area Health Board to



Photos by Michelle Alaimo



**Kim Contreras, right, talks with Emily Fanjoy, volunteer coordinator for Tillamook County Women's Resource Center, at an information table during the Renewing Spirits luncheon held at the Elders Activity Center on Monday, Oct. 19. The event is held annually to bring assault/sexual assault awareness to our neighbors and Tribal community.**

**Lisa Norton, executive director of My Sisters' Place, speaks during the Renewing Spirits luncheon held at the Elders Activity Center on Monday, Oct. 19. My Sisters' Place serves people facing domestic violence, sexual assault and dating abuse in Lincoln County.**

begin the Renewing Spirits events.

"My world changed," said Adams. "So here we are today. This is for our Elders. This is for our mothers, our grandmothers and for you."

Falla, the Tribe's Domestic Violence Advocate, then introduced Norton as the luncheon's guest speaker.

"I was first introduced to her when she was a member of the Sexual Assault Task Force and now she is the director of one of the advocacy centers in Lincoln City – My Sisters' Place," said Falla of Norton. "We've done a lot of advocacy together. She's been amazing for me to learn from and to grow from."

Norton, who is a member of the Siletz Tribe, started her slideshow presentation by saying "trauma is life-changing."

Norton discussed the effects of trauma on a person's brain and she explained how people's minds and bodies react to trauma. She talked about the fight or flight response, but she added the "freeze."

"When you freeze it's not your fault – it's your body trying to keep you safe," said Norton. "Trauma affects how we walk in the world. Trauma affects the way we reach out for help."

"What we know about post-traumatic stress disorder is that the single biggest element in recovery is belief, support and validation. In order to have recovery you must be believed."

Adams said the first step in the healing process is acknowledging the issue exists.

"Everyone deals with and responds to abuse differently," said Adams. "It's multi-generational trauma. We're talking about it and that is one thing I want our nation to know is we are talking about it. It's deep stuff."

"This is for the grandmas that couldn't say a word. It's for our men as well. It's going to take everyone to stop the violence."

Falla said the Renewing Spirits luncheon was designed to give the Tribal membership a voice and to help them understand the trauma that they have faced as a people.

"Everybody in this community has pulled together to say it's important," said Falla.

Falla said that most advocacy centers miss the opportunity to reach out to Native Americans.

"Historical trauma when it comes to Tribal nations is usually lost," said Falla. "People kind of specifically try and treat people the same. They miss the historical trauma so I think it is really powerful and important to talk about it."

"It's powerful to give that voice to Tribal members within this community and for community members in general to understand a little bit of their identity and who they are, and to understand the

trauma that they have faced."

Falla said the recognition of Native American populations being at an increased risk for domestic violence and sexual assault is changing. She said that advocacy centers like Polk County's Sable House, Yamhill County's Henderson House, Marion County's Center for Hope and Safety and Tillamook County's Women's Resource Center were all represented at the Renewing Spirits luncheon.

Falla said the most important part of her job with the Tribe is being able to say "I believe you" to her clients.

"I just listen and let them be as honest as they want to be," said Falla. "I'm willing to listen."

Norton said Native communities are unique and they need this type of awareness and education so they can finally move past it as a people.

"There is a fairly selfish part of that because I'm Native and I see the pain so intimately in my circle," said Norton. "I have to assume that it's not just me or my Tribe or my circle. Native people have been socialized to shut up to survive. We aren't going to fix it until we can talk about it. As Native people we have been so conditioned as a way of protecting ourselves to keep silent. It's especially important for us to stop."

Norton said the most important message she can convey is that people facing these issues are not alone.

"It's important for people to understand we've all walked a similar journey," said Norton. "There is a very fundamental empathy that we all need to have with each other and it is so important in our journeys because when I'm privileged enough to bear witness to a story and aid in somebody's healing I'm hearing a message for me as well."

Norton said the issue has to be brought out in the open now.

"In order to address trauma in a way that we are going to be able to heal from it, it has to be done from peeling back the secrecy and making it OK to talk about these things," said Norton. "For me, it's the first step."

"You can recover. It can be done. It is work, but it doesn't have to be the way it has always been. Everybody in this room has had trauma in their life. We need to be kinder and gentler to each other."

After Norton's presentation concluded, George gave the pre-meal invocation after thanking everyone who attended. Before the prayer, he told the audience of his own experiences with the issue and that the luncheon was one more step in our healing.

"As we live with this and the trauma that we go through, it's not for us to forget, but in a way to forgive," said George.

Adams said she wants the discussion to be continued.

"I hope that we can bring this luncheon every year for as long as the Tribe exists," said Adams. "We are starting a new generation and they need to know that there are no more excuses for violence in Indian Country." ■

## Fish & Wildlife Committee has e-mail address

In an effort to better serve the membership, the Tribe's Fish & Wildlife Committee created an e-mail address for those who hunt, fish and gather on the Reservation. The e-mail address is designed so that Tribal members can make the committee aware of any concerns or questions, and to make positive comments. The committee will do its best to provide answers and feedback so that everyone who wishes to utilize the Reservation lands may do so legally.

Submit your comments, questions and concerns to [FW.Committee@grandronde.org](mailto:FW.Committee@grandronde.org). ■