

Tribal Council luncheon honors first responders

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

August 2015 will be remembered in Grand Ronde for an almost disastrous perfect storm of a wildfire occurring less than five miles from the Reservation, an attempted armed robbery at Grand Ronde Station, a suspicious package incident at the Procurement Building on the Tribal campus and smoke from massive eastern wildfires inundating the Grand Ronde Valley, making breathing difficult.

However, the fire was contained, the robbery suspect apprehended, the suspicious package destroyed and Grand Ronde residents cared for until the unhealthy smoke was blown away by favorable winds.

All the while, many hours were worked by Tribal staff, including the Tribal Community Emergency Response Team and Mobile Emergency Medical Response Team, and members of the West Valley Fire District and Yamhill County Emergency Management Office.

To thank all of those for their efforts over the summer, Tribal Council sponsored a First Responders Appreciation Luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 1, in the Tribal Community Center.

After an invocation by Tribal Council member Denise Harvey, Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno thanked those in attendance for their prompt responses to the emergencies, especially the Willamina Creek Fire that burned approximately 230 acres within five miles of the Tribe's forested Reservation land.

"That week, we got hit with everything," Leno recalled. "We had robberies, we had a fire and



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Colby Drake, Tribal Silviculture & Fire Protection Program manager, fills out an after action review questionnaire, with input from Michele Volz, right, Tribal Natural Resources Department senior administrative assistant, during the First Responders Appreciation Luncheon held at the Tribal Community Center on Tuesday, Dec. 1. Tribal Emergency Operations Coordinator Jamie Baxter handed out the form to solicit feedback on what went well and what could be improved upon from responders to the wildfire and smoke events that occurred in August near and in Grand Ronde.

we had accidents. Anytime you do these responses, I think you think that you are prepared, but, realistically, you aren't prepared until it really happens. When it really happens, you have to learn from it.

"I think a lot of people have done a great job through our fire deal. You guys got out there, handled that forest fire. ... That is not just timber to us; it was part of our Restoration. One of the most sovereign things we've got."

Leno said that he hopes that Tribal emergency personnel learned from all of the different incidents that occurred in August because they may happen again.

"I think we just got done facing one of the toughest fire seasons Oregon has probably had in a long time," Leno said. "Hopefully, we won't do it again, but I think the response within the community, within the Tribe really met the call for that fire that went on up Willamina Creek."

Leno also honored Violet Folden, a Tribal Elder who passed away in November. She was a member of the Community Emergency Response Team that reacted to the smoke that blanketed the valley by helping to open a shelter at the Elders Activity Center.

"Violet was one of the first to jump up and open the shelter for the folks that were affected by the smoke," said Tribal Emergency Operations Coordinator Jamie Baxter. "I still feel her and really want to honor her."

Leno led a moment of silence in Folden's honor.

Attendees were served a lunch of enchiladas, Spanish rice, refried

beans and salad prepared by Nutrition Program Manager Kristy DeLoe and her staff.

Also attending the appreciation luncheon were Tribal Council members Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Brenda Tuomi and Ed Pearsall.

Tribal employees who attended included General Manager David Fullerton, Police Chief Al LaChance, Publications Coordinator Dean Rhodes, Photographer Michelle Alaimo, Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson, Fire Protection Program Manager Colby Drake, Fire Protection Technicians Jim Pinder, Logan Kneeland and Jeremy Ojua, Natural Resources Senior Administrative Assistant Michele Volz, Sgt. Jack McKnight, Officers Tim Hernandez and Tyler Brown, 477/VR Administrative Assistant Kalene Contreras and Social Services Secretary Rhonda Leno.

Members of the Natural Resources Department's Wildland Firefighters who attended included Richard Nelson, Jordan Utti, Joseph Dowd, Daniel Schramm, Jeramy Trammel, Dustin Hawks and Gabe Synegal.

West Valley Fire District employees Zack Hatner, Tami Tigner, Seth Bellarts, Brendan Leaho, T.J. Greenhill and Sean Cameron also attended.

The meal was served by Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin, Tribal Council Senior Administrative Assistant Lauri Smith, Tribal Council Administrative Assistant Shannon Simi and Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark.

In closing, Yamhill County Emergency Management Manager Sue Lamb said there were many lessons learned over the summer.

"A lot of it comes down to just people working really hard and doing the right things," Lamb said. "That's what makes it work in the long run."

"We're developing some really great practices here in the state of Oregon and here at this Tribe," Baxter added. ■

Let's talk about food!



Thursday, January 28 - 5:30-7:30pm
Grand Ronde Community Center
9615 Grand Ronde Road (across from the monument)

Do you have access to affordable and nutritious food?

Join us for a free dinner and ongoing community conversation. Possible topics include: grocery buying clubs, gardening, hunger, youth opportunities, and more!

Please RSVP to Francene Ambrose by Monday, January 25th:
<http://goo.gl/forms/VKhdi5iBrz> or 503-879-3663

This event is free and open to any community member.



Training pays off

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"If they walked away thinking about something differently or having a different perspective about something, I was happy," Reeves said.

Sherwood said she related to the video and felt the message of Adichie's talk was universal in its application.

"I thought of our families and that there is so much more to them than anybody ever knows," Sherwood said. "If you go to a powwow or a gathering and you see the beautiful regalia and the beadwork and the woven baskets and the hats and you just think 'They love it.' It's their passion."

"So part of bringing the curriculum into a different perspective is to see that these families have

a lot to offer. There is a culture in everybody's family. Watching that video really brought that phase home for me."

Reeves said the work they are doing with the school district is paying off in better communication.

"We have teachers that are very interested in knowing more about their students and more about their families," Sherwood said. "I think just having that connection to each other to build a better community as a whole is going to make our community stronger. One of the things I have found with teachers is they don't want to be inaccurate. They want to make sure that what they are teaching and what they are giving the families is culturally accurate and sensitive to the children's needs. Hopefully things like this make people become more aware." ■