

Membership briefed about Emergency Management

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

EUGENE – “If you prepare for something, it won’t happen” was Tribal Emergency Operations Coordinator Jamie Baxter’s positive mantra to the membership as she briefed General Council on the Tribe’s Emergency Management program on Sunday, April 3, at the Valley River Inn.

If true, Tribal planning for an emergency will keep the No. 1 natural disaster threat in the United States from happening – a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake that could occur off the Pacific Ocean coast from northern California to southern British Columbia and probably cause billions of dollars of damage in western Washington and Oregon.

Baxter encouraged Tribal members to prepare and plan ahead. If nothing else, she advised, create a family communication plan so that family members will know how to contact each other in the event of a massive earthquake that likely will bring down many bridges in Oregon and make travel difficult.

“The biggest thing for people is, ‘Where is my family?’” Baxter said about her experience responding to natural disasters.

Baxter joined the Tribe in March 2014 and has extensive real-world experience in emergency management, serving at Ground Zero in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and in American Samoa after the 2009 tsunami. She also worked in New Orleans and New Jersey following the Katrina and Sandy hurricanes, respectively.

She said Oregon is not immune to modern-day disasters even though the last Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake occurred in 1700, before European explorers and Lewis & Clark arrived in the homelands of Grand Ronde’s ancestors.

There was the 1962 Columbus Day windstorm, the Spring Break quake of 1993, the Vernonia flooding of 1996 and the Woodburn bank



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Tribal Emergency Operations Coordinator Jamie Baxter briefed the general membership on the Tribe’s Emergency Management program during the Sunday, April 3, General Council meeting held at the Valley River Inn in Eugene.

bombing in 2008.

“Catastrophic events happen every day and they impact people, all people,” Baxter said. “And life is never the same after a catastrophe. We need to realize that we are all connected. For those of you who live in the Eugene and Springfield area, they have strong emergency management programs here. So what I would ask is that people get involved with your local program. The only real successful programs are the ones that integrate community partners, your community and your neighbors. ... In order for a program to be effective, it has to be integrated into everyday life.”

For example, Baxter said, count the number of bridges you cross during daily routines. They might not be standing after a massive earthquake. How will you pick up your children at daycare or get your medication?

Baxter said the goal of the Tribe’s Emergency Management program is to create a resilient and prepared community that will get the Tribe and its businesses back up and running quickly after a natural

disaster.

“We don’t want to just respond, but to recover,” Baxter said.

Baxter surveyed many of the things her department has accomplished in the last two years, from creating hazard mitigation and emergency operations plans to holding Community Emergency Response Team trainings to conducting active shooter drills to planning continuity of government operations.

Currently, the Tribe is setting up a ham radio station on the Tribal campus and already has a satellite trailer that can access Internet and phone should a region-wide disaster occur.

“If we have a catastrophic earthquake, which is a biggest threat, everybody will be on their own island somewhere because your island will be defined by your bridges,” she said. “In addition to you, we want our homes, our businesses and your culture to survive following an event. We want to get this up and running as quickly as possible.”

The Tribe will be participating in a June 7-10 multi-state training exercise called Cascadia Rising that is a large planning event for a possible devastating region-wide earthquake. A mass casualty event will be held on the Tribal campus on June 9.

Although some attendees at the Eugene meeting do not live in the Grand Ronde area, Baxter said Tribal emergency preparedness can help them as well. In addition

to creating a family communication plan, she encouraged attendees to obtain disaster supply kits, stock up on essentials, including extra medication and pet food, secure furniture to walls and get involved in local organizations planning for natural disasters.

“The bottom line is we all choose where we live,” Baxter said, adding that some people live in tornado-prone areas and Oregonians must deal with the possibility of earthquakes. “My philosophy is that if you plan for it now, it will not happen. If it does happen, our preparedness actions will lessen the impact of the event, save lives and help us recover faster.”

Baxter added there is now an e-mail for Tribal disaster events at incident.command@grandronde.org.

“We are so lucky to have Jamie working for us with her experience and her knowledge,” said Tribal Council member Denise Harvey after the presentation.

In other action, it was announced that the next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, May 1, in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde.

Debi Anderson, Russell Wilkinson, Liz Leno, Shelly Winter and Leah Villa won the \$50 door prizes and Jessica Wolpe, Eric Bernando and Pam Darcy won the \$100 door prizes. Two necklaces created by Tribal Council member Jon A. George also were raffled off.

George joined Tribal Culture Department employees Kathy Cole and Brian Krehbiel in performing the cultural drumming and singing to open the meeting.

The meeting can be viewed on the Tribal website at www.grandronde.org, clicking on the News tab and then Video. ■

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Canoe Meetings

Hello Community! We would like to invite you all to the Canoe meetings set for this year.

When: May 14, June 12

Who: Those people interested in participating in Canoe Journey

Time: 12-3pm (Lunch is provided)

Where: Grand Ronde Tribal Gym

**Please contact Cristina Lara for more information
503.879.2040**