

Community Fund surpasses \$70 million in giving

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

Young people at their most vulnerable were the primary beneficiaries of this quarter's Spirit Mountain Community Fund distribution held in Grand Ronde on Wednesday, June 15, at the Tribal Community Center.

During the ceremony, Spirit Mountain Community Fund also surpassed the \$70 million mark for charitable giving since its inception in 1997. The fund has now distributed 2,317 grants to 1,038 organizations and all nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon.

Twenty-nine grants were made during the June distribution with 25 large grants of \$5,000 or more totaling \$910,005 and five small grants of \$5,000 each. Total distribution was \$935,005 to organizations that work on issues related to health, education and environmental preservation.

The three largest grants were for \$75,000 and went to Bridge Meadows, an intergenerational housing community in north Portland; Catholic Community Services Foundation, an apartment reconstruction project for young pregnant women; and Looking Glass Youth and Family Services for its 2016 capital campaign.

Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George welcomed large grantee representatives to the Community Center.

"Welcome to Grand Ronde," said George. "It is always wonderful to have you with us here today. We are celebrating 29 new grants and we have a very, very special way of getting things started. We have an exclusive group; these folks don't sing for just everybody."

Culture Department Manager Kathy Cole joined Chinuk Teacher Jeff Mercier, Chinuk Immersion Apprentice Santiago Atanacio, Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark, Culture Department Office Assistant Nicholas Atanacio, Teen Pregnancy Prevention Specialist Cristina Lara and Chinuk Wawa Teaching Assistant Zoey Holsclaw in leading children from the Chinuk Immersion class in singing two drum songs.

George then introduced Sho Dozono, chairman of the Spirit Mountain Community Fund Board of Directors.

"Thank you for what you do for our communities because you do the hard work," said Dozono, a Portland businessman. "You are the best."

George introduced her staff, Program Coordinator Louis King and Grants Coordinator Julia Willis, and Willis announced that the Community Fund has given \$70,157,648.10 in its 19 years.

"They have all the answers," George said of King and Willis.

George then asked guests to pause for a moment to remember the victims of the nightclub shooting that occurred in Orlando, Fla.

"Please take a minute to think of the lives lost and the families whose lives were changed forever," George said. "It always feels difficult after



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Victory Academy Founder and Director of School Tricia Hasbrook talks with Spirit Mountain Community Fund Program Coordinator Louis King during the fund's quarterly grant presentation held in the Tribal Community Center on Wednesday, June 15. The nonprofit, which is a year-round accredited school for children affected by autism, received a \$25,000 grant for its community-based after school program for children with autism.

such a senseless tragedy to just move on. Of course we don't move on. And yet the work of helping our Elders, helping the most vulnerable continues and you folks here today answer that need. We are honored to support your ability to meet those needs.

"It's hard at times to remain hopeful, but I think that we here at Spirit Mountain Community Fund are fortunate because we get to see the heroism of people helping the most vulnerable and the most needy every day. We get to work with heroes. And you are those heroes."

George said that the day's grant recipients are reasons to be optimistic.

"It is because of people in this room, people here today, sitting in these chairs before us that more than 100 rural kids will have a safe and educational place to be when school is not in session," said George. "That's a reason for hope. And 16 children who have life-changing challenges due to orthodontic problems will get braces at no cost to their families. And that's a reason for hope."

After George showed the fund's informational video about the Tribe and its history, she turned the check distribution over to King, who announced the names of grantees while Dozono handed out the checks.

"We thank you for the hard work you do," King said.

The first organization to receive a \$50,000 check was Advantage Smiles for Kids from Redmond. Advantage Smiles is a nonprofit organization founded in 2003 to provide dental care for at-risk, low-income children.

Advantage's Executive Director Michael Vendrame accepted the check from Dozono.

"This program specifically focuses on helping those kids that are suffering because they are being

bullied and ridiculed because of the aesthetic look of their teeth," said Vendrame. "Orthodontic need is not enough. It has to be where the child doesn't smile, doesn't participate in class, they don't raise their hand. We have kids that don't go out on recess. We have a large amount of kids' homeschooled or doing online school because their social peer relationships were a disaster. They were suffering terribly."

Vendrame said the privately-funded program focuses specifically on children who need the care the most and that each child they help is first referred to them from teachers, counselors and Court Appointed Special Advocates.

George said she also takes pride in seeing that the Board of Directors saw fit to fund the local CASA organization out of Corvallis, as well.

CASA Voices for Children received a \$30,000 check to help pay the cost for advocate training.

The organization's mission is to recruit, train and professionally support court-appointed community volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children during court proceedings.

"Truly a tremendously vulnerable community," said George of children identified for help through CASA. "Our kids who have been removed from their homes and have gone into the state child welfare system, these kids are at tremendous risk. The system they go into is an incredibly difficult one. Supporting this vulnerable population is something that is so important to us."

CASA Executive Director Kari

Rieck said the relationship with Spirit Mountain Community Fund is important to her organization. She said this is the third time it has received support from the Community Fund and that the organization wants to have the same success the Tribe has had over the years.

"There is so much hope when you come and get the presentation and see how the Tribe has thrived," Rieck said. "To go back and do that for our children in our community is such a powerful thing. It really energizes me when I leave here. I'm always humbled and inspired after leaving the awards ceremony. I have great respect for the resiliency and generosity of the Tribe."

Another grant recipient was Incight, whose mission is to unlock the potential of people with disabilities by supporting and empowering education, employment and independence.

Incight Founder and Development Director Scott Hatley and Executive Director Chris Chiacchierini received the nonprofit's \$35,000 check.

Hatley said the organization has previously received support for its scholarship and internship programs.

"We've been very fortunate over the years to receive a number of grants from Spirit Mountain Community Fund," said Hatley. "We are just so appreciative of the opportunities that are provided specifically for us with creating more opportunities for people with disabilities."

Hatley said the Community Fund is currently supporting Incight's curriculum project.

"What we noticed was there was a need for transition teachers that work with transition students with disabilities in high school," said Hatley.

He said the curriculum project will focus on getting students to succeed in their education and job pursuit once they complete their education goals. The curriculum project and its 50 lesson plans will be rolled out this fall.

"Incight is an amazing organization," said George. "The particular project we are going to support is to expand their program that reaches into the school system and reaches out to those kids that our system has labeled 'special ed.' It is very rare that schools form plans for the success of these kids. I think what is fantastic about Incight is it is an organization that just stepped in and started addressing these inequities."

George said the funding priorities for children are to intervene as early as possible.

"Those early investments are highly prioritized," said George. "We feel it's the right thing to do. These projects will give hope and that changes the world." ■

Name changes in Tribal Court

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