

Banks School Board approves mascot agreement with Tribe

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

The Banks School Board unanimously approved an agreement with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde on Wednesday, June 15, and took the first step in retaining the district's longtime "Braves" mascot by eventually phasing out the use of a Native American profile as its current image.

The five-year agreement now will have to be approved by the Grand Ronde Tribal Council and be submitted to the Oregon Board of Education before it becomes effective.

"We are happy we are now in a place where we can enter into a partnership and look forward to great things," School Board President Raymond Mott said about negotiations between the Tribe and school district that started in December.

The Banks School District becomes the first in Oregon to take advantage of exceptions created by the Oregon Board of Education to its ban on Native mascot use. The exceptions allow some school districts in Oregon to keep their Native American mascots as long as they consummate collaborative agreements with a federally recognized Tribe.

The Banks-Grand Ronde agreement requires the district to modify its current mascot image to ensure that it is culturally appropriate with input from the Grand Ronde Tribe's Culture Department. The new image and use of the name "Braves" will be allowed as a sports mascot, on all sports equipment and facilities, and used in "school spirit" related merchandise, the agreement states.

Only the new agreed-upon mascot image will be used on products purchased by the district after the



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno speaks at the Banks School Board meeting held on Wednesday, June 15, about the agreement between the Grand Ronde Tribe and the school district regarding its continued use of a Native American mascot. Listening are, seated from left, Superintendent Jeff Leo and School Board members Norie Dimeo-Ediger, Laurie Schlegel, James Harris, Todd Iverson and Chairman Raymond Mott.



Graphic created by George Valdez

effective date of the agreement and the district has five years to phase out use of the old, culturally inappropriate mascot image on uniforms, signs and equipment.

In addition, the Banks School District agreed to start using a Grand Ronde Tribe-created Native curriculum no later than spring 2017 and to sponsor a Native Club for students in sixth through 12th grades.

Superintendent Jeff Leo said the district is happy to incorporate the Tribal curriculum because the current curriculum is "outdated."

The agreement also requires that a school principal, coach or other responsible official take all reasonable measures to ensure that coaches, players, students and supporters maintain a "respectful attitude" toward Native mascots during sporting events.

"If the school principal, coach or other responsible official of Banks High School witnesses or is aware of derogatory and/or unsportsmanlike language or activities involving the Braves mascot, the school will file a written notice with the OSAA (Oregon School Activities Association) in accordance with their rules regarding violation of regulations, seeking penalization of the offending school," the agreement states.

The agreement can be terminated by either party. If the Tribe ends the relationship, the district will have 12 months in which to stop using a Native mascot and the Braves name. If the district terminates, it must stop using the mascot and name immediately.

"I don't anticipate that," Leo said. Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, Tribal Council member Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, Historic Preservation Department Manager David Harrelson, Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin and Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark attended the meeting.

Leo, in his first year on the job after leading the schools in Nappa, said 3 percent of the district's approximately 1,100 students identify as Native American.

He said the school's Braves mascot has been used for about 85 years and is important to the community. He said the cost of phasing out the old mascot in favor of a Tribally approved, more culturally appropriate mascot will be about \$80,000 over five years.

The district already has painted the gym walls white and is preparing to replace the Native America profile in the middle of the gym floor. "As I said in an e-mail to a bunch of our coaches, we have a blank canvas now," Leo said. He estimated there are as many as 400 depictions of a brave's profile

on campus that will need to be replaced or eliminated.

Harrelson also briefed board members and the approximately two dozen people in attendance on the Tribe's historical connection to the Banks area.

Banks is within the traditional homelands of the Tualatin Kalapuya and sits along an old Indian trail that stretches from western Washington County to Tillamook Bay. The Tualatin Kalapuyan people had numerous villages in what is now Washington County with a concentration of winter villages in Patton Valley south of Banks.

The agreement states that the Grand Ronde

Tribe's goals are to build respect and understanding of the Tribe's history and culture, give all youth the opportunity to learn the Tribe's curriculum and to foster culturally respectful representation of Native American symbolism and pride. The district's goals are to foster respect and informed understanding of the Tribe and other Native Americans, and to adopt a culturally appropriate mascot.

"This was a very serious issue for our Tribe," Leno said. "Some had different opinions on it. We acknowledged everybody's opinion on it, but our Tribal Council said, 'Which one is it? Is it the mascot that is the important issue or is it education?' Our council stepped up and said education is a huge issue for us. We believe it's a way out for our kids and into the bigger world. Education is very important for us so we said education is it."

Leno said that he did not see political promises of getting education about Oregon's Tribes into the public school system being fulfilled, so the Tribe decided to create its own curriculum.

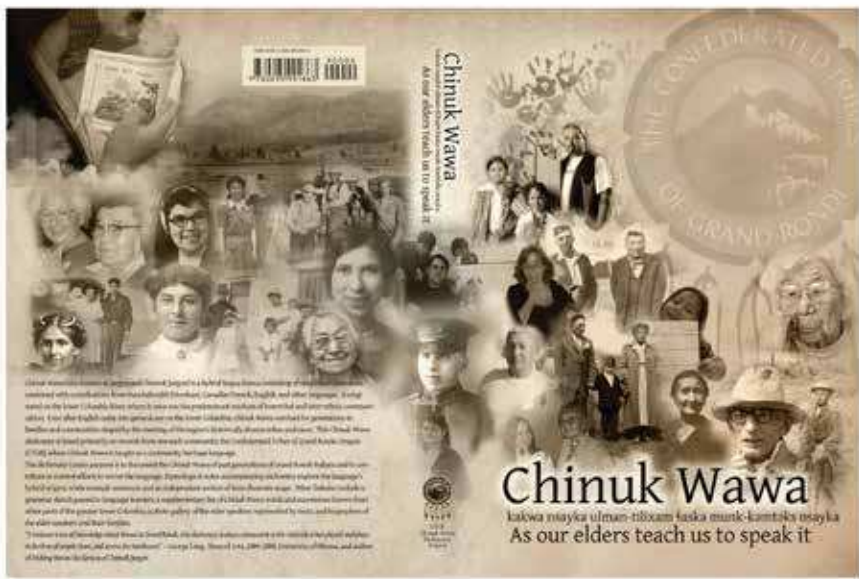
"If you live in Oregon, you should know the true history of the Oregon Tribes," Leno said. "I've said it several times, but if you have the real history of the Oregon Tribes out there, then maybe in five or 10 years we won't have a mascot issue. People will learn to respect and know what we traditionally do."

Leno added that he has eight grandchildren in public schools and knows that every dollar is important. "Every dollar that goes to education needs to be spent on education, not signs or things on the wall or whatever," he said. "We know this will be successful and hopefully we can look back and say we took that first step toward educating Oregonians."

At the end of the meeting, Banks School Board members gifted Tribal representatives with baskets that included Banks Braves baseball caps, huckleberry jam and huckleberry-flavored chocolate, among other items.

"It's been a lengthy process," Leo said. "But it's been worth it. I want to thank the Grand Ronde Tribal Council, which has been willing to work with us through this process." ■

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