

66 employees honored for 820 years of service

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Sixty-six employees were honored for a combined 820 years of service to the Grand Ronde Tribe during a third-quarter Years of Service ceremony held on Thursday, Nov. 3, in the Tribal gym.

Leading the pack in longevity was Natural Resources' Timber and Roads Program Manager Jeff Kuust, who reached the 27-year mark in working for the Tribe.

Joining him in the quarter-century or more club were Higher Education Manager Bryan Langley at 25 years, and Health Benefits Specialist Barbara Steere, Staff Accountant Melanie Hubbard and Procurement Assistant Kelly Herber at 26 years apiece.

Employees reaching the 20-year mark of service included Assistant Tribal Attorney Kim D'Aquila and Health & Wellness Data Entry Specialist Sharon Wattier, and Tribal Attorney Rob Greene notched his 22nd year of employment.

Natural Resources Manager Michael Wilson and Finance Officer Chris Leno both reached 24 years of service.

Third-quarter recipients were hired between July and September.

Employees received certificates and bonus checks in appreciation for their increased tenure with the Tribe. In addition, those reaching the 10-year mark received a Tribal Pendleton blanket or an extra \$100 in their bonus check.

The ceremony began with an invocation from Tribal Historic Preservation Office Manager David Harrelson and then employees were treated to a breakfast of scrambled eggs, sausage, hash browns, bagels and cream cheese, fruit, and juices and coffee to drink.

Breakfast was served by Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin, Public Affairs Administrative



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Tribal Higher Education Manager Bryan Langley receives a fist pump from Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi while going through the receiving line at the third-quarter Years of Service ceremony held Thursday, Nov. 3, in the Tribal gym. Langley reached the quarter century mark in employment with the Tribe. Others in the receiving line were, from left, Tribal Council members Chris Mercier, Denise Harvey, Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Kathleen George, Chairman Reyn Leno, Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin and General Manager David Fullerton.

Assistant Chelsea Clark, Food Sustainability Administrative Assistant Patricia LeClaire, Tribal Council Administrative Assistant Shannon Simi, Economic Development Administrative Assistant Meghan Zimbrick and cook Charles Neujahr.

General Manager David Fullerton introduced Tribal Council members in attendance, which included Chairman Reyn Leno, Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Brenda Tuomi, Kathleen George, Chris Mercier and Denise Harvey.

"I would just like to say that this is always our opportunity to acknowledge a lot of people who have been here a given amount of time and acknowledge the newer people who have come," Leno said. "I would just like to thank you and acknowledge all of the hard work you do for us and do for our membership."

Leno discussed the draft 2017

budget and re-assured employees that the coming budget year will not require staffing changes because of the scheduled opening of the Cowlitz casino in April 2017. He reminded Tribal employees of how the Tribe worked on keeping people employed during the economic downturn in 2008.

"We had a great commitment to keep people working, not only here but at the casino," Leno said. "We lived up to that. So I don't really believe that the '17 budget is really going to be the biggest impact. I believe that '18 will really be the year to really know the impact, and will it be a severe impact? I don't know."

Leno said that employees should remember that Spirit Mountain Casino offers Class III Las Vegas-style gaming while the Cowlitz's casino will only be Class II.

"We believe that we have a good product down here," Leno said. "We just pumped in about \$13 million down at our casino to stabilize it. Overall, I think we stand strong and I think we have a lot of reserves to back us up."

Harrelson also gave a brief cultural presentation on Termination and Restoration.

Other employees honored during the third-quarter event included:

19 years: Cultural Adviser Bobby Mercier.

18 years: Head Start Teacher Toni Lockwood, Family Services Assistant Elaine Lane Raven and Dental Hygienist Sheila Blacketer.

17 years: Procurement Supervisor Kevin Mueller.

16 years: Elementary Lead Matthew Bucknell, Senior Network Administrator Jack Dobiash, Tribal Court Judicial Assistant Julie Boekhoff and Grand Ronde Police Department Records/Evidence Clerk Egypt Leno.

15 years: Security Officer Roel Hernandez and Education Senior Administrative Assistant Deborah Bachman.

14 years: Part-time College Program Coordinator John Harp, Audit Director Trudi Yoshikawa, Natural Resources Machine Equipment Operator Mark Mercier and Treasury Manager Rick Anderson.

13 years: Benefits Specialist Peggy Carpenter, Nutrition Program Manager Kristy DeLoe and Ceded Lands Coordinator Brandy Humphreys.

12 years: Enrollment Specialist Jolanda Catabay, Health Information Technician Stephanie Simmons, Tribal Council Administrative Assistant Shannon Simi, Finance Executive Assistant Ken Trevino and Employment Specialist Brandy Hembree.

11 years: Housing Services Coordinator Deborah Kroeker, Purchased/Referred Care Specialist Erica Mercier and Wellness Driver Susan Sabey.

10 years: Acting Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Louis King and Graphic Designer George Valdez.

9 years: Central Phones Operator Scarlett Holtz, Senior Help Desk Technician Alec Palanuk-Mercier, GIS Coordinator Volker Mell, Cook Aaron Neujahr, Publications Coordinator Dean Rhodes, Swing Shift Housekeeper Kelly Mercier and TERO Workforce Development Specialist Misty Carl.

8 years: Controller Linda Hanna, Middle School Lead Matthew Zimbrick and Lead Pharmacy Technician Kande Little.

7 years: Patient Account Representative Kayla Leno.

6 years: Maintenance Technician Jason Bailey, Health Information Technician Amanda McMahon, Oral Historian Specialist Stacey Runningbird, TERO Compliance Officer Marvin "Duke" Kimsey Jr., TERO Administrative Assistant Lori Sterling, Cultural Collections Coordinator Veronica Montano, Education Department Manager Angie Blackwell, Housing Maintenance Technician Michael Lane and Cultural Resources Department Manager David Harrelson.

5 years: EHS Home Visitor Amber Mercier, Youth Education Administrative Assistant Amber Yates, Cultural Resources Project Development Manager Julie Brown, Laboratory Manager Sharon Laddusaw, Medical Technologist Staci Robbins, Laboratory Assistant Alisha Joachim, Legal Secretary Susan June and Economic Development Administrative Assistant Meghan Zimbrick.

Following the Years of Service presentation, Terry Pietras, communications officer with the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, handed out certificates and a commemorative challenge coin to Tribal employees who participated in the June Cascadia Rising earthquake exercise held on the Tribal campus.

Employees honored were Holly Engles Thompson, Pattie Mercier, Dean Rhodes, Dalette Remington-Nash, Elaine Lane, Kim D'Aquila, Rhonda Leno, Niki Mosley, Scarlett Holtz, Patrick Dempsey, Shannon Simi, Jennifer Biesack, Nancy Renfro, Andrew Freeman, Daniel Mooney, Briece Edwards and Michelle Alaimo.

Human Resources staff members also raffled off prizes that included Amazon gift cards, road safety kits, Fire readers and extra administrative time. ■

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