

# Tribal Elder bags first elk after 56 years of hunting

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

A holiday present came a little early this year for Tribal Elder Martina “Tina” Gilbert when she took down an elk in early December after decades of coming up short while hunting with her family.

Gilbert, 74, has harvested many deer in her years of hunting, but had never been successful in harvesting an elk until now.

Gilbert said she has been hunting since she was 18. She went hunting for elk with her nephew, Jesse “Pee Wee” Robertson, when she finally got her shot and made the most of it.

Gilbert is the daughter of Juanita John and the granddaughter of Leo Norwest. She got a chance to hunt for elk because of the additional opportunity provided to Tribal members through the Tribe’s Hunting Tags Program.

“I’ve been hunting for 56 years, going on 57,” said Gilbert, who began hunting when she married Russell “Pete” Gilbert. “We were in Coos Bay and Creswell and then we moved over to Silver Crescent in ’89 and we hunted over there. We used to go to Steens (Mountain) a lot. And then we moved to Silver Lake and we hunted there.”

Hunting season 2016 was the second year of the Tribal Hunting Tags Program that gives Tribal member hunters additional hunting opportunities for game on Reservation lands.

The tags are available to members because of the work being done on an ongoing basis for the Tribe’s Fish and Wildlife Management Plan, which was adopted by Tribal Council and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in September 2014.

The agreement gives the Tribe the authority to administer and delegate its own hunts.

“She came in and she was all excited and told us the story and was just running on adrenalin,” said Wildlife Biologist Lindsay Belonga of the moment she saw the elk in the back of the family’s truck outside the Natural Resources Department building off Hebo Road. “She was very, very excited about the whole situation. I’m very happy and proud of her.”

Belonga said that the hunts have been successful and that the additional tags and hunting opportu-



Submitted photo

**Tribal Elder Martina “Tina” Gilbert harvested her first elk in early December after decades of coming up short while hunting with her family. She received the opportunity thanks to the Tribe’s additional hunting tags issued for Reservation lands.**

nities are doing exactly what they were designed to do – bring about successful hunts.

In 2015, 46 additional tags were made available to Tribal members who hunted during two black-tailed deer seasons and two Roosevelt elk seasons. The Tribal hunts took place a few days before the state-administered open season hunts.

Belonga said four animals – two deer and two elk – were harvested in 2015. Results for this season are still being gathered.

Belonga said the opportunity to hunt for members has now come full circle and that the filling of tags is exactly what was hoped for when Tribal staff negotiated these opportunities with the state.

Gilbert, who said she usually hunts with her sister, Ida, these days except for on this day Ida was suffering from a cold, took off about 7:45 a.m. with her nephew. She said the first two places they looked were already occupied by hunters, but that the third stop was the charm.

“There was snow all over and nobody had been in there,” said Gilbert. “So we went up through there and, shoot, we hadn’t went a mile and a half when Pee Wee said ‘There they are, Auntie. Get out of the car’ and I said ‘I am’.”

Gilbert said she took a stance in front of the car.

“I spotted him right off – the spike,” said Gilbert. “I kept my eye on him after I shot him.

“I took off where the elk went

and I spotted the blood. Then I kept tracking and more blood. So we tracked him and got onto him and he was laying down.”

Gilbert, who also filled a tag during the regular hunting season this year when she harvested a buck, said they needed help getting such a large animal down the mountain and they recruited assistance from family members who came and helped.

“We got him out within two hours and had him in the pickup,” said Gilbert. “It was exciting. I’m 74 years old now and it is the first elk I ever got in my life.”

Gilbert uses a specially cut-down version of a .264 Winchester Magnum when she hunts and she said she has had that gun for years. “I rely on that gun,” she said.

Gilbert’s success is precisely what Fish and Wildlife Program Manager Kelly Dirksen dreamed of when he directed his staff to start working on the Hunting Tags Program years ago.

“It is exactly what we hoped for,” said Dirksen. “We were always looking for ways to provide a distinct benefit to the membership that didn’t also just go to everybody. Lindsay has worked hard at getting those tags and the season organized, and this one is just a great story. I think she had mentioned that she had been hunting for 50 some years before she got this elk. She got it under the Tribal tag so for us that is really thrilling.”

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, himself an avid hunter, said he is happy for Gilbert and her family, and even happier for the larger Tribal family.

“I always say for every Tribal member out there – even though you may not hunt or you might not fish – recovering the sovereignty piece of it is very important and this is the reason why,” said Leno. “I always say it completed the circle. We’re back. When you see this it really makes it worthwhile. That’s what it means to me.”

Despite her success and taking down her first elk in over five decades of trying, and despite impressing everyone who has heard the story from family members to members of Tribal Council – she did not impress her hunting partner that day.

Gilbert, who was preparing the elk meat to be distributed throughout the community and within her family, said Pee Wee reminded her that right next to the spike she shot was the herd’s big bull elk. She laughed and said she never saw the bull.

“Pee Wee said, ‘Well didn’t you see the big bull on the side?’ and I said ‘Heaven’s no’ I was shaking bad enough with the spike – if I had seen him I probably would have shot in the air,” Gilbert said, laughing. ■

**TEACH** our children our stories

**BECOME A TEACHER.**  
APPLY TO AITP  
[www.pdx.edu/aitp](http://www.pdx.edu/aitp)

AMERICAN INDIAN TEACHER PROGRAM

## Community Conversation

Let's talk about the connection between food and health!

Share your experiences & learn about ways to connect food and health in your community.

**FREE DINNER!**

**WHEN:**  
Thursday  
February 9, 2017  
6-8pm

**WHERE:**  
West Valley Community Campus  
266 SE Washington St.  
Willamina, OR 97396

This event is free and open to all community members in the Grand Ronde, Willamina, Sheridan area. Childcare is not provided.

Please RSVP by **February 6th** by calling 503-581-3855

Questions? Contact Lexi Sticker at 503-581-3855.

Organized by members of the Food Access & Community Team and the Marion-Polk Food Share.