

General Council briefed on Tribal educational efforts

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

CLACKAMAS – In 2014, a study funded by Spirit Mountain Community Fund and conducted by ECONorthwest and the Chalkboard Project found that Tribal students throughout Oregon showed an elevated rate of chronic absenteeism in public schools.

One-third of Tribal students were chronically absent, meaning they missed 10 percent or more of school days, the survey found.

In reaction to those findings, the Grand Ronde Tribe started an effort to encourage Tribal students to attend school with increased tutoring options and targeted family services.

At the Sunday, Feb. 5, General Council meeting held at the Monarch Hotel in Clackamas, Education Department Manager Leslie Riggs reported that those anti-absenteeism efforts are paying off with 68 Tribal students who have a 95 percent or better attendance rate, meaning they missed two or less days of school.

“This is really a big deal,” Riggs said, adding that the Willamina School District hired an employee to track Tribal student attendance primarily in the elementary grades. Approximately a third of Willamina students are Native American.

Riggs added that every Tribal student enrolled in Willamina or Sheridan high schools who were seniors in 2016 graduated.

Improved attendance was just some of the good news Riggs delivered. In addition, more than 70 percent of Tribal preschool students are meeting expectations as they prepare to enter public school kindergarten.

“That’s a really important thing,”



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Tribal Education Department Manager Leslie Riggs gives a presentation to General Council on Sunday, Feb. 5, at the Monarch Hotel & Convention Center in Clackamas.

Riggs said. “Getting them prepared to go into kindergarten is basically what our purpose is. The more early literacy that they have ... will have an impact on their ability to perform in kindergarten and the years to come.”

On the other end of the education spectrum, the Tribe had 45 graduates in 2016 with 13 Tribal members obtaining an associate degree, 21 earning bachelor degrees, seven attaining master’s degrees and two receiving doctorate degrees. In addition, five Tribal members received a GED and two earned vocational certificates.

Riggs said the Tribe invests between \$2 million and \$2.5 million annually into the higher education of its members.

Higher Education Manager Bryan Langley said that the most common higher education degrees earned by Tribal members are in the business or education fields.

“Providing education to our membership was part of the initial Reservation compact and it has always been a priority for Grand Ronde,

and the lives of the membership and their families have improved because of it,” Riggs said.

Tribal Council member Chris Mercier, who is currently attending law school, said that the financial support that the Grand Ronde Tribe provides helps members to not accrue significant student loan debt like many of his fellow nonTribal students at Lewis & Clark College.

Riggs also reported that the Tribally created fourth- and eighth-grade history curriculums are now being used in almost 50 Oregon public school districts.

“We’re the forerunners on this. ... The feedback that we are getting is amazing. The teachers love it,” Riggs said. “We haven’t had to strong arm anyone into doing it.”

Riggs added that the Oregon Legislature is considering Senate Bill 13, which would direct the state Department of Education to develop curriculum relating to Native American Tribes in Oregon and provide professional development related to the curriculum.

Riggs also discussed the Tribe’s Chinuk Wawa language immersion program, family services coordinators who help Tribal families deal with public school staff members and policies, and the Tribal Library during his 35-minute presentation.

“I just think it is really cool when folks go full circle,” Riggs said about Tribal members who start in the Tribe’s education program and then grow up to obtain jobs working for the Tribe. “They come back and give back to the community.”

“I think our membership should really be thankful,” Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno said, thanking longtime Education De-

partment employees and Tribal members who have served on previous and current Education Committees.

Riggs fielded five comments and questions from Tribal members in attendance.

In other action, it was announced that the next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, March 5, at the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde.

Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George joined fellow Tribal members Jade Unger, Greg Archuleta, Chris Rempel, Lisa Archuleta, Riggs, Savannah Ingram, Eric Bernardo, Tynan George and Miguel Adams in performing the cultural drumming and singing to open the meeting.

Robert Schlappie, Reymond Resendiz, Rempel, Ingram and Carol Haskins won the \$50 door prizes and Mike and Maxine Clements and Adrainne Llanaez won the \$100 door prizes. In addition, 10 ham/turkey gift certificates donated by Tribal Council and two beaded necklaces made by George were raffled off.

After the main General Council meeting, a Community Input meeting facilitated by General Manager David Fullerton was held with remaining Tribal members to solicit input on Tribal programs and to discuss possible future advisory votes. One of the key results of the meeting was Tribal member concern over Tribal economic development efforts.

In addition, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene briefed the membership on the new General Council Ordinance.

Additional Community Input meetings will be held after the General Council meetings held in March in Grand Ronde and in April in Eugene.

Videos of both meetings can be viewed in their entirety at the Tribal website, www.grandronde.org, by clicking on the News tab and then Video. ■

CTGR TERO Announcement

Traffic Control Flagger Training Certification

When: Thursday, March 30, 2017
Where: Employment Services Center in Training Rooms A & B
Time: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Registration is limited to 30

No cost for enrolled Tribal members from federally recognized Tribes and \$75 for non-Tribal members

Register with the TERO office by calling 503-879-2188 or
Email - TERO@grandronde.org

Ad created by George Valdez

Free Playgroup in Grand Ronde!

Children & Family SERVICES

Family Building Blocks
Keeping Children Safe and Families Together

When: First Thursday of each month 10:00 am-11:30 am

Where: CTGR – Community Service Center 9625 Grand Ronde Road Grand Ronde, OR 97347

Who: Parents and Caregivers of children under 5 years.

Why: Come to play, have a snack and have fun!