

# Cherry named new Community Fund director

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Running Spirit Mountain Community Fund is starting to look like a position that runs in the Robertson family.

Mychal Cherry, sister of Angie Blackwell, who ran the Community Fund from March 2000 to July 2004, has been hired to succeed recently elected Tribal Council member Kathleen George in supervising the Tribe's philanthropic arm.

Cherry and Blackwell are the daughters of former Tribal Council member Candy Robertson, who was a key figure in the Tribe's Restoration efforts in the early 1980s.

"I was fortunate enough to have someone in the family who has been in this position," Cherry said. "I was able to sit down with her and pick her brain a little bit. That was really awesome and she gave me some insight. Same thing with Kathleen."

"I'm happy that the Tribe has filled this role with yet another strong woman," said Blackwell, who is now the Tribe's Early Childhood Education manager. "She brings a whole new set of experiences that will contribute to a fresh perspective. I am confident Mychal will leave her own unique mark while building upon the legacy left by Kathleen, Shelley (Hanson) and me."

Cherry has spent the last 13 years working at Spirit Mountain Casino, most recently as the casino's marketing manager. In that position, she supervises approximately 48 employees and oversees VIP Services, the Coyote Club and the call center, among other duties.

Cherry starts her new job on Wednesday, Feb. 15, and will have to adjust to a change of pace. Spirit



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Tribal member Mychal Cherry has been named the new director of Spirit Mountain Community Fund.**

Mountain Community Fund has a staff of three full-time employees, including the director's position.

"When I was interviewing, Sho (Dozono, Spirit Mountain Community Fund Board of Directors chairman) said, 'You do realize this is a department of three people?' I said, 'Yes, I do.' It will be very welcome right now."

Dozono said that he was personally impressed by Cherry's professional demeanor during the interview process.

"I think with her background with the Tribe and work history with the Tribe that Mychal is imminently qualified to continue the work that Kathleen George has done," Dozono said. "We thought that Mychal had the background and skills to take us to the next level. She is imminently qualified to speak on behalf of the Community Fund and her management skills are superior."

Cherry said the impetus for her to apply for the Spirit Mountain Community Fund job was volunteer work that she does outside of her casino job.

"I wasn't looking for a job," she said. "The catalyst for this job is really outside of my work. I do a lot of volunteer work, not only with my church, but I have a lot of passion for education and youth. I sit on many different committees. ... Philanthropic work and just having that compassion piece for people in need and wanting to see change, that's what pulled at my heart strings. I just feel like that's who I am. I just really felt like it would be something I would be good at and decided to go for it."

Formed in 1997 as part of the Tribe's gaming compact with the state of Oregon, the Community Fund receives 6 percent of proceeds from Spirit Mountain Casino and distributes those funds to nonprofit organizations in 11 northwest Oregon counties on a quarterly basis and annually to the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon.

Since its inception, the fund has given out 2,400 grants and approximately \$72.3 million.

Cherry said she has no immediate plans for changes within the internal operations of the Community Fund, preferring instead to learn the current system and then try and enhance those processes that are working well.

"I like to come in and just see how things are going and just take that time to see what is going well," Cherry said. "You're not going to know that coming into a brand new position. You don't want to have any knee-jerk reactions."

One of her first challenges, however, will be getting the Community Fund's staff back up to three people. The fund's longtime program coordinator resigned effective Feb. 3, leaving Grants Coordinator Julia Willis as the sole employee until Cherry comes on board.

Cherry added that she feels like she is coming home, having started her career on the Tribal government side with the Social Services Department.

"I am so grateful and so appreciative of the opportunity," Cherry said. "I'm only a mile down the road at the casino, but I just have this sense of coming home. This is where my career started 20 some years ago. It feels really good to be back."

"I grew up in Grand Ronde at the time of Restoration. We lived next to the cemetery in a house that's no longer there. That was clearly a time when the Tribe didn't have a lot to give. Even our own family relied on the community for support. I remember a particularly tough Christmas when members of the community brought me and my sisters presents. I'll never forget that feeling of being so thankful. Now that the Tribe is so fortunate to be able to give back, I get to show my appreciation as well. That's full circle, isn't it?" ■

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