

Cow Creek leader Sue Shaffer walks on at age of 94

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Indian Country lost a big leader in a small package when former longtime Cow Creek Chairwoman Sue Shaffer walked on on Tuesday, April 11, in Roseburg at the age of 94.

Shaffer guided the Cow Creek Tribe when she took over as Tribal chair in 1983 and was instrumental in getting Congress to formally recognize the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians.

She also was instrumental in getting the federal government to loan the Tribe money for a bingo parlor in Canyonville, which continued to expand into the Seven Feathers Casino and Resort operation that it is today.

Shaffer worked on getting the first gaming compact ever in the state and convinced then-Gov. Barbara Roberts to sign it.

Shaffer served as Tribal chair through 2010 and also served on the Umpqua Community College Board of Trustees and was the first female to chair the board. She also received the Roseburg Area Chamber of Commerce 1999 President's Award for outstanding contribution to community in economic development.

Locally, Shaffer served on the Canyonville Planning Commission and City Council, as well as the Douglas County Historic Resources Review Committee.

Nationally, Shaffer served as a delegate to the National Congress of American Indians, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and the Indian Women's Leadership White House Conference.

She received many awards, including honors from Lewis & Clark College, the Oregon Democratic



Smoke Signals file photo

Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison, left, shares a laugh with Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians Chairwoman Sue Shaffer as they wait for Grand Entry to start during the second annual Gathering of Oregon's First Nations Powwow at the Oregon State Fairgrounds Pavilion in Salem in January 2010. Shaffer walked on on Tuesday, April 11, at the age of 94.

Party, the Daughters of the American Revolution and Portland State University.

"Oregon families have lost an extraordinary champion," Sen. Jeff Merkley said in a press release. "I loved her from the first time I heard her deliver a fiery call to action at a political event. She was known for her straight-forward style, her honesty and integrity. She was deeply involved in serving her Tribe and the wider Douglas County community. She was a passionate and effective leader."

"We will all remember the powerful role she played in fighting for the restoration of the Cow Creek Band and in standing up for regular folks. We will greatly miss her."

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde held a dinner honoring

Shaffer at Spirit Mountain Casino in July 2010. Attendees included former Gov. Vic Atiyeh, Legislative Commission on Indian Services Director Karen Quigley and former Grand Ronde Tribal Council Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison.

"She is a hero," said former Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom, who emceed the event. "A great leader among women, a warrior who gives and gives and gives. She is out there fighting all of the time. She is someone I would like to emulate."

"We are witness to greatness," said then-Grand Ronde Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryl A. Kennedy.

Tom posted on Facebook after Shaffer's passing: "My heart is very heavy for the Cow Creek Tribe. They lost a great leader. ... Dad (Leon "Chip" Tom) and I had the honor of working with her; always a champion for Tribes and their people. A great loss in Indian Country."

"I always enjoyed working with her," Tribal Council member Denise Harvey posted. "She was a strong Native woman and great leader. She will be missed, but not forgotten."

The Cow Creek released a statement on its Tribal Facebook page: "Chairman Shaffer's passing is a

significant event for the Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe. Her leadership was remarkable to the Tribe's success. Her unique combination of vision, focus and determination made her unstoppable as she led us to our 1982 federal sovereignty re-recognition. Those same traits led to businesses as well as programs that benefitted Tribal members' health, education and housing needs. Her influence and impact extended and benefitted many at the state and national level, too. She was a beloved Cow Creek Tribal member. Her loss is deeply felt."

Quigley, who worked for many years with Shaffer on the Legislative Commission on Indian Services, said that she was the best kind of champion for Tribal sovereignty.

"Sue spoke her mind and got her message across," Quigley said. "No one who ever dealt with Sue mistook her for a sweet little old lady. However, she had a great smile and laugh which came along with her strong beliefs and opinions. She was determined to make sure the state of Oregon remembered its history began in a way that caused extreme grief and hardship for her Tribe and other Tribes that had made this land and water their home for thousands of years."


"She was even more determined that the state of Oregon and the U.S. government realize that the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians were still here, still strong and always a Tribal nation. She would speak loudly and clearly, and untiringly, about the political and legal status of Tribes. The Legislative Commission on Indian Services was strengthened by her long years as a member. She had the respect of a vast array of local, state, federal and Tribal leaders and was genuinely concerned about the welfare of all."

"She was very grateful for the special evening and dinner hosted by Grand Ronde some years ago to celebrate her and her incredible contributions to her Tribe, her state and to Indian Country. She was an impressive leader and a wonderful friend." ■

Includes information from the Roseburg News-Review.


Public Hearing:

Tribal Priorities and Budgeting
Sunday, June 4, 2017
11 a.m. to conclusion
Tribal gymnasium



*Tribal members and their guests are invited to attend the public hearing. Tribal members will be allowed to testify in person or submit written testimony on what they see as the Tribe's priorities and provide input on the Tribal budget and budgeting process.

Please submit written testimony to
Stacia Hernandez at
Stacia.Martin@grandronde.org



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