

Community Fund surpasses \$76 million in giving

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Spirit Mountain Community Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, surpassed the \$76 million mark in giving on Wednesday, Dec. 13, when it awarded 31 large grants and nine small grants totaling \$770,422 during its fourth-quarter check presentation held in the Governance Center Atrium.

For the year, the Community Fund awarded 170 large and small grants that totaled \$4,128,158. Those grants included 101 large grants worth more than \$3 million, 50 small grants totaling more than \$250,000, seven grants to Oregon Tribes totaling \$770,000 and 12 20th anniversary celebration grants that were worth \$5,000 each or \$60,000 total.

Since its inception in 1997, the Community Fund has awarded 2,570 grants to 1,115 nonprofit organizations in 11 northwestern Oregon counties that total approximately \$76.5 million.

The annual Oregon Tribal grants, which are designed to aid Tribes that are traditionally underserved by charitable organizations, were worth \$110,000 each and awarded to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua & Siuslaw Indians, Burns Paiute Tribe, Coquille Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

The Grand Ronde grant will help fund child and adolescent psychiatric services at the Health & Wellness Center.

Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George opened the check presentation with a prayer song before Spirit Mountain Community Fund Board of Trustees Chairman Sho Dozono introduced Tribal Council members in attendance, which included Jack Giffen Jr. and Denise Harvey. Giffen and Harvey also serve on the fund's Board of Trustees.

Attendees watched a 12-minute video that surveyed the Tribe's history and featured organizations that have been helped by Community Fund grants. Dozono, who was festively attired in a Santa hat, then quizzed grant recipients with 10 questions that were mostly answered correctly.

Craig and Renee Oviatt from Salem Dream Center, which received a \$25,000 large grant to help break generational poverty through building a learning center, gave a brief presentation on the work they do in the Edgewater neighborhood in west Salem.

Craig Oviatt said the Dream Center helped combat high crime rates, gang activity, food insufficiency and



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Salem Dream Center Executive Director Craig Oviatt speaks about his nonprofit during Spirit Mountain Community Fund's Winter Grant Presentation held in the Governance Center Atrium on Wednesday, Dec. 13. Next to him is his wife, Renee, associate director at the organization.

poor educational outcomes in the community.

"We decided to move into a neighborhood that was predominantly run by gangs," he said. "It was a very violent, dark, hungry, scary place."

However, after 14 years of working in the community, Salem Dream Center has improved the neighborhood through establishing relationships, even with gang members.

The Dream Center established a medical clinic, helped youth with their homework and ran a mentorship program, as well as opened the local middle school on the weekend to give youth something to do.

"We learned right away that the only way to mend a broken heart or a devastated life is through a relationship," he said.

Today, Craig said, the juvenile crime rate in Edgewater is 29 percent lower than communities with similar demographics in the nation and the local middle school has the lowest vandalism rate in the Salem-Keizer School District. In addition, the neighborhood gangs are gone and people are not afraid to walk in the community.

"We were there to tell these kids that they matter," he said, before introducing two youth who have been helped by the Dream Center. "Making a difference in lives takes partnerships and we thank you so much for partnering with us and helping us to make a difference."

Community Fund Grants Coordinator Julia Willis and Program Coordinator Angela Sears then read off this quarter's grant recipients while Community Director Mychal Cherry handed out gift bags and Dozono distributed the checks.

Other large grants recipients on Dec. 13 were:

- Active Children Portland, \$25,000, for increasing qualified coach/mentors for underserved youth;
- American Diabetes Association of Portland, \$25,000, for the "What Can I Eat?" Program;
- Building Blocks to Success Corp. of Portland, \$30,000, for the LEGO Robotics programming;
- Inc. of Milwaukie, \$25,000, to expand the Annie Ross House emergency homeless shelter;
- Old Mill Center for Children and Families Inc. of Corvallis, \$20,000, for creating trauma-informed after-school environments;
- Oregon Black Pioneers Corp. of Salem, \$10,000, for the "Racing to Change: Oregon's Civil Rights Years" project;
- Oregon Health & Science University Foundation of Portland, \$10,000, to support the OnTrack-OOSHU! Effort;
- Oregon Partnership Inc. of Portland, \$25,000, to fund an integrated approach in addressing and preventing youth suicide;
- Providence Child Center Foundation of Portland, \$25,000, to help build a strong dental home for children with special needs;
- Returning Veterans Project of Portland, \$10,000, for the Multnomah County service project;
- Southwestern Polk County Rural Fire Protection District of Dallas, \$15,000, to improve the district's communications system;
- SPOON Foundation of Portland, \$30,000, for the Nourishing Oregon's Foster Children effort;
- Todos Juntos Inc. of Canby, \$30,000, to improve culturally competent equitable after-school programming for rural Clackamas County youth;
- World Arts Foundation of Portland, \$25,000, for "Race Talks," which works to break the chains of racism.

Small grant recipients were:

- Black United Fund of Oregon Inc. of Portland, \$7,000, for the Mentor4Success program;
- Campus Compact of Oregon of Portland, \$6,600, for Equity Action Teams that promote racial equity in higher education;
- City Club of Portland, \$3,000, to fund civic scholars;
- Elevate Oregon of Portland, \$7,500, for the "Dreamreachers" program that helps young women navigate success;
- Forward Stride of Beaverton, \$7,500, for the Youth Tribal Horse project;
- Friends of the Sweet Home Library, \$2,500, for the Keeping Kids Reach effort;
- Girls on the Run International of Portland, \$7,500, for program scholarships;
- Northwest Noggin of Portland, \$5,000, for "Synapses & Stories: Coyote, Grizzly and Their Brains";
- And Yamhill County Treatment Courts Foundation of McMinnville, \$5,000, to support recovery for Treatment Court participants.

Spirit Mountain Community Fund receives 6 percent of Spirit Mountain Casino proceeds to distribute to nonprofits in 11 northwestern Oregon counties in categories that include public safety, education, environmental protection, health, arts and culture and problem gaming.

After the check presentation concluded, check recipients had their photos taken by *Smoke Signals* photographer Michelle Alaimo. ■