

TERO workers feted at Friday feast

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

Will James was working for the Postal Service and struggling to make ends meet when he first learned of the Tribal Employment Rights Office program offered through the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

"I needed a change from my current work situation because I wasn't getting the hours I needed to be financially stable," James said. "I really appreciate the opportunity TERO gave me to get into a prevailing wage job. Now, I have been hired on full-time."

It is stories like these that make TERO Compliance Officer Duke Kimsey smile. At a Friday, Feb. 23, dinner held at the Elders Activity Center honoring TERO employees, he noted that many of those workers he had referred out for jobs have built strong relationships with various contractors and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

"We have become a resource for the contractors when they need employees and they even call us when it's not a TERO job or they are not required to, and that makes our staff very proud because we know that they are all working very hard and proving themselves out on these jobs, which require a lot of stamina and hard work."

TERO was enacted in November 2013 to promote the interests of self-governance and ensure that Indian people can participate in economic opportunities on and near the Reservation. The opportunities include job preparation and training, and Tribal contracting and subcontracting.

The ordinance requires all employers, including Tribal government, Tribal businesses and contractors who perform work on the Reservation, to provide Grand Ronde Tribal and Indian preference in employment, and Indian preference in contracting and subcontracting.

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy gave the invocation. She thanked Tribal staff who manage the program and TERO employees who work on the various projects and are able to earn living wages.

Vice Chair Chris Mercier, Tribal Council member Denise Harvey and past Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg, who serves on the TERO Commission, also attended the dinner.

Interim TERO Director John



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Employment Rights Office Compliance Officer Duke Kimsey, right, hands Robert Rife a prize he won during the TERO Worker Appreciation Dinner held at the Elders Activity Center on Friday, Feb. 23.

Mercier described the group as a team.

"We all work together to be employed in good-paying jobs, but also in transportation and transportation construction," he said. "We forged this partnership with the Oregon Department of Transportation for the betterment of our TERO workers."

ODOT has entered into agreements with various Tribes to give Indian preference for qualified workers on various projects, particularly those that are near Tribal lands.

In 2016, there were 69 TERO employees who worked on 16 transportation projects for a total of 19,322 hours.

"It was a busy year," Mercier said. "In 2017, things slowed down a bit, but that happens."

ODOT Regional Field Coordinator Paul Joiner attended the dinner and said when he first became involved with the TERO program, he "didn't have a clue."

"I have been in workforce development most of my career, and I have to say this is one of the best or very best programs I have seen," he said. "People are being trained and going to work. This is wonderful."

Randall Bennett, a certified flagger, has been with the program for three years.

"I really enjoy helping and mentoring the new people," he said.

"TERO helps me to help others. I enjoy helping people get connected and showing them the ropes."

Connections are what make TERO work well, Kimsey said.

"I want to thank ODOT for these opportunities that have been given to our Tribal people," he said. "Without them not all of this would be possible. Our TERO is kind of the middle man between these projects and our people. We get thanks all the time when we refer someone out to these jobs, but all the thanks really are to be given to ODOT and the workers themselves, because without them none of this would be possible."

TERO workers honored were

Daniel Alexander, Jeremy Bailey, Randall Bennett, Sean Beauchamp, Nick Bishop, Erin Case, Sydney Clark, Derrick Cooper, Craig Fermoore Jr., Alan Crain, Elisa Crawford, Richard Cummings, Alan Cureton, Sage David-Miller, Steven Devault, Andrew Edwards, Justin Erickson, Murray Farlow, Christopher Freeman, David Garcia, Keith Gonzalez, Timothy Grefsrud, Joe Ham, Shane Harmon, Collins Hinch, David Holmes, Austin James, Chris Johnson, Fred Joseph, Joshua Kneeland, Kenny Lafferty, Joseph Lane, Reynold Lane, Tim Lane, Tyson Lee, Scott Lenaburg, Chad Leno, Brett Leno, Leon Luey, Martinez Veda, Wayne Miller, Sean Mitchell, Michael Moore, Richard Nevarez, Mike Norwest,

Jason Norwood, Paris Nunes, William Patching, Jesse Peone, Sergio Ramirez, Robert Rife, Dakota Rock, John Runningbird, Jeremy Russell, Sam Sampson, Jesse Sampson, Isreal Scot, Michael Shaw, Luke Soderberg, George Spino, Steven Taggart, Jordan Tinoco, Don Wabaunsee, Tim Watson, Corey Weston, Travis Weston, Calib Wilson, Jimmy Wilson, Lee Wilson and Matt Zimbrick.

While attendees dined on meatloaf and mashed potatoes, drawings were conducted for two \$25 Lowe's gift cards, Shell gas cards and Spirit Mountain Casino gift cards, along with safety T-shirts and TERO bags. ■

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