

Member Services upheaval

Enrollment records review prompts controversial changes

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

An internal Tribal review of enrollment records has resulted in the departure of two longtime Member Services Department employees and the appointment of an acting manager within the department.

Member Services Department Manager Penny DeLoe and Enrollment Specialist Jolanda Catabay are no longer Tribal employees, according to a Feb. 28 e-mail sent out to Tribal employees by Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez.

On Thursday, March 8, Hernandez announced via e-mail that former Cultural Resources Department employee Veronica Montano has been appointed acting Member Services Department manager.

In a Tribal Council statement released to *Smoke Signals* on Thursday, March 1, Hernandez said the review was prompted by Tribal members who requested a meeting with Tribal Council to discuss concerns about their enrollment records.

"Following this meeting, we requested a review of these members' records and turned the matter over to our staff," the statement said. "As a result, personnel changes have been made in the Member Benefits/Enrollment Department."

The Tribal Council statement said that since the situation involves employment and personal enrollment matters that the Tribe will not go into specifics regarding who requested the review and what findings prompted the staff departures.

"The integrity and security of records is of the highest importance," the statement said.

However, Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said during the Wednesday, March 7, Tribal Council meeting that further review of additional enrollment records beyond those of the Tribal members who had requested the meeting is now occurring.

"In an effort to be thorough, staff has expanded the review to include all members' files," Kennedy said. "We will be keeping you updated as we progress along those lines."

The Member Services Department handles many important payments for the Tribal membership, such as per capita, Elders' pensions and Social Security disability payments. It also deals with enrolling new members into the Tribe and supervises Records employees.

Hernandez said that phone calls to Member Services should go to

503-879-2490 and e-mails should be sent to memberservices@grandronde.org. Montano's contacts are 503-879-2253 and veronica.montano@grandronde.org.

"Staff has evaluated the needs of the department and put backup measures in place using current staff in the department and from other Tribal offices," the Tribal Council statement said. "We do not expect any impact on membership or applicants for enrollment during this time. The open positions in the department should be posted next week."

DeLoe was a 24-year employee of the Tribe and was named Member Services manager in 2010. Catabay started working for the Tribe in July 2004.

DeLoe supervised the Member Services Department during the enrollment audit started in 2012 that resulted in Tribal members being disenrolled for such things as membership in more than one Tribe.

Social media erupts

The departures sparked discussion and speculation about the reasons why on Grand Ronde Tribe-oriented Facebook pages and amongst Tribal members even before official word was released by Hernandez.

Tribal Elder and former Enrollment Board member Sharon Freund said on Facebook that they were "being raked over the coals for the audit that the previous council and members asked them to do." Freund is also DeLoe's sister.

Former Tribal Council member Tonya Gleason-Shepek acknowledged that since it is an employee matter that Tribal Council might not be able to discuss specifics regarding the departure of two longtime employees.

"Our membership is deeply divided on enrollment issues," Gleason-Shepek wrote on Facebook. "We will see if Tribal members' opinions on enrollment will blind them and allow this to move forward without integrity or accountability."

Former Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno wrote on Facebook that he was concerned that Tribal members will not know where to go for answers to their questions, especially with a March 16 per capita payment date approaching.

Gleason-Shepek and Leno also inquired at the Wednesday, Feb. 21, Tribal Council meeting if there was an additional enrollment audit occurring.

Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier said, "I guess there was an investigation ..." before being interrupted by Tribal Council member Kathleen George, who cautioned against discussing active audits in a public forum.

"If there is an investigation that is ongoing, that's not something that would be discussed in a public forum ... because of the concern for something that is ongoing in terms of what that would mean for the purposes of an investigation," Tribal Attorney Rob Greene said in response to Leno.

A call for Tribal members to attend the Sunday, March 4, General Council meeting to ask questions about the change in leadership at Member Services also was posted on Facebook.

General Council discussion

Catabay and DeLoe attended the March 4 General Council meeting, but only DeLoe commented.

Most of the 110-minute Other Business portion of the meeting concentrated on the process that resulted in their departure from Member Services and whether the Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance was followed in this situation.

"We walked into something that we didn't know," DeLoe said about when she and Catabay started in Member Services. "We started seeing errors, errors. How can we continue to enroll when all we were seeing was these errors? So what we did is we had a year-long meeting with council, saying, 'We're concerned. We'd like these files audited.' Never did we say anything about disenrollment. So, we had the audit done. ... We seen

the devastation that they wanted us to move forward with. So I went into council ... and we said, 'Don't make us do this. Don't let us tear this Tribe apart. Please, allow us to grandfather these people in, correct all of the records and go forward.'

"We were told, 'You go do the job.' We didn't want to. And I regret every day that I went forward and did the job that council told me to do because all it has done to this Tribe is literally tear it apart. It hurt families. ... Do you think I want to go sit in those hearings and be raked over the coals for three years, to hear an Elder of 90 some years old cry on the phone? Do you know how bad that makes me feel? But I did what I was told to do and then to be treated in the way that I have been treated and Jolanda has been treated. ... I hope you guys are proud of what you've done over the last week because for 24 years every day I walked in this organization for this Tribe, every Tribal member. ... I've done the job that I was asked to do and if nothing else, I am proud of that."

Hernandez said that Tribal members who want to review their enrollment records can view or receive copies under the recently amended Enrollment Ordinance.

"For now, please e-mail memberservices@grandronde.org with any questions about your member benefits or the process to access your enrollment records," Hernandez said. ■



TUMWATA LECTURE SERIES
JUNE 16, 2018 1PM TO 5PM

End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center | Organized by | The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
1726 Washington St, Oregon City, OR 97045 | Hosted by | The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

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| GREG ARCHULETA 1:00PM NATIVE PLANTS AND TRIBAL USES IN WESTERN OREGON GRAND RONDE TRIBAL MEMBER AND LIFEWAYS INSTRUCTOR | VIRGINIA BUTLER 2:00PM ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FORLAND BASIN PROFESSOR AND CHAIR, DEPT. ANTHROPOLOGY, PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY | STEPHEN DOW BECKHAM 3:00PM THE SURPRISING ADVENTURES OF GEORGE GIBBS IN THE OREGON COUNTRY PAMPLIN PROFESSOR OF HISTORY EMERITUS, LEWIS AND CLARK COLLEGE | DAVID HARRELSON 4:00PM VANISHING RACE, BURIED TREASURE, AND THE NOBLE SAVAGE: MODERN MISCONCEPTIONS OF NATIVE AMERICANS CULTURAL RESOURCES DEPT. MANAGER CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF GRAND RONDE |
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Fee assistance

Enrolled Tribal members can request assistance with test fees (i.e. GRE, SAT, LSAT, ACT) and admissions application fees. Contact Higher Education for more information at 1-800-422-0232, ext. 2275. ■