

Thirteen departments are led by Tribal members

EMPLOYEES continued from front page

so they can meet job requirements for well-paying positions, as well as the November 2013 adoption of the Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance that seeks to give Tribal members more participation in economic activity in and around the Grand Ronde Reservation.

Other reasons are as varied at Social Services’ 477 program getting Tribal members on-the-job training experience, the Temp Pool that allows Tribal members to obtain work experience and the Summer Youth Employment program that often gives Tribal youth some of their first jobs.

“The Temp Pool has been the stepping stone for a lot of employees getting their foot in the door,” says Employee Relations Specialist Steve O’Harra. “The Catch-22 is having the experience and it has given people the experience.”

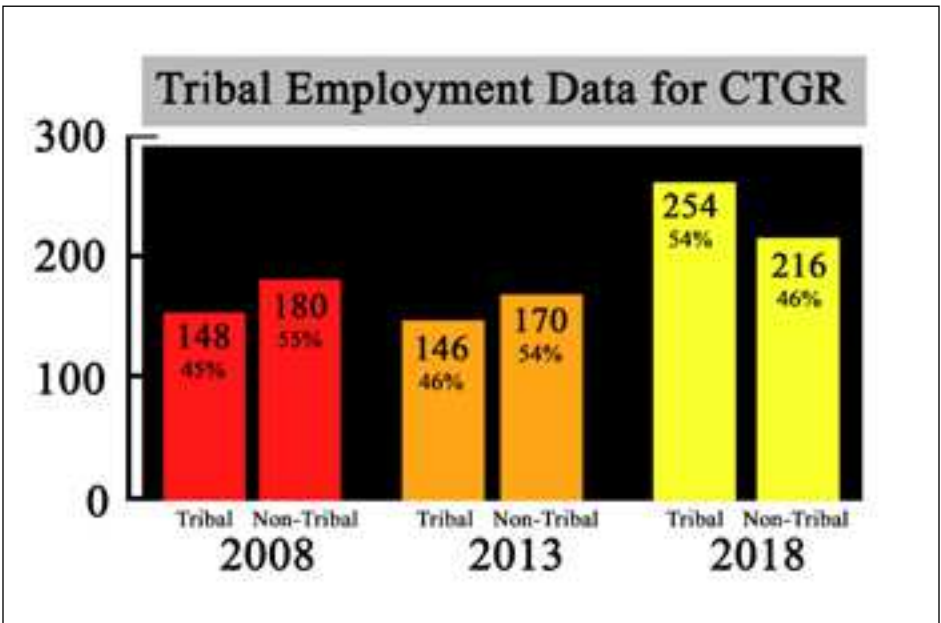
Another reason, Fullerton says, is Tribal members moving up the ranks within the Tribal government.

Thirteen departments within the government are led by Tribal members and some of those Tribal member managers, such as Michael Wilson at Natural Resources, Dana Ainam in Social Services and Jake McKnight with the Police Department, are long-time employees who have gradually worked their way up.

“When I started here 18 years ago, you had a lot of Tribal members at lower levels in the programs,” Fullerton says. “I think through attrition and building people’s skills, they’ve moved up within the departments.

“If you dissect those 13 (Tribal member department managers), I would contend that a lot of them were not directly hired into that management position out of school or off the street. They worked their way up.”

Fullerton and Human Resources staff members also say the domino



Graph created by George Valdez

effect of better educated Tribal members, combined with the TERO mandate to give Tribal members an opportunity to work, is creating situations where many governmental job openings never reach the external hiring phase. Instead, Tribal members are competing and losing out to other Tribal members.

“I think it creates a lot of frustration for those Tribal members who don’t get hired, but ultimately we are hiring a Tribal member,” Fullerton says.

“Our most often heard complaint from Tribal members is ‘How come that Tribal member got the job?’” Human Resources Department Manager Patrick Dempsey says. “It’s often a difficult decision. It comes down to six highly qualified Tribal members. They all go to the interview, go through the same routine, and you have to make a tough decision.”

Fullerton also points to the fact that Tribal members view working for the government as a career and that the two Tribal employees who have worked at the Tribe for more than 30 years – Tresa Mercier and Gregg Leno – are both Tribal members.

“There has been more of an emphasis on hiring Tribal members and giving them an opportunity

to do the job,” Fullerton says. “I think Tribal members do want to work for the government and Tribal members in the service-based departments that we have really take pride in providing good services to the membership.”

The growth in overall Tribal governmental employees from 316 in 2013 to 470 in 2018 – an almost 50 percent increase – is attributable to growth, Dempsey says.

“There’s been lots of growth,” Dempsey says. “We’re now over 500 employees on this side of the street. ... That’s contributed greatly to it.”

In the last five years, a police department has started, security has been brought in-house, the Chacha-

lu Museum & Cultural Center came online, the TERO program started and even Human Resources for the casino and government consolidated under the government umbrella.

“It’s really across the board in hiring,” Dempsey says.

In addition, O’Harra says, about 15 positions were held unfilled when there was a hiring freeze implemented in anticipation of the opening of the Cowlitz casino in April 2017.

“I think working with the other departments – Social Services, the 477 program, we’ve worked with Education on projects throughout the years, with TERO – has all contributed with helping Tribal members get employed here,” O’Harra says.

Meanwhile, the odds that you are talking to a Tribal member at Spirit Mountain Casino are about the same as they have always been. Only 9.4 percent – less than 1 in 10 – of the 1,023 employees are Tribal members.

Dempsey says that casino work remains challenging with its 24/7 schedule, challenging work conditions, and less pay and benefits.

“I think the biggest impediment for Tribal members working at the casino are the working conditions,” Dempsey says, adding that the Grand Ronde Tribe is following the same trend as other Tribes he has worked at with Tribal members starting at the casino and eventually migrating to government jobs. ■

Social Services has bike helmets

The Tribe’s Social Services Department has bicycle helmets available for distribution. Those needing a helmet should visit the department and sign a helmet application, as well as get fitted.

For more information, contact Social Services at 503-879-2034. ■

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