

Grand Ronde hosts annual Tribal-State Summit

By Danielle Frost

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Tribal Council members from across Oregon, elected representatives and state officials attended what is now the third decade of government-to-government consultation between the state and its nine federally recognized Tribes on Tuesday, Nov. 27.

In 1999, Senate Bill 770 was enacted, requiring the governor of Oregon to convene an annual meeting where representatives from state agencies and Oregon's Tribes could work together to achieve goals. This legislation was co-sponsored by then-Sen. Kate Brown of Portland.

When the Tribal-State Summit opened at Spirit Mountain Casino, Brown, who is now governor, talked about how the concept of government-to-government consultation is evolving in its third decade.

"I see agency leaders who are knowledgeable and sensitive to Tribal concerns," Brown said. "When I go to other meetings, it is clear that the work we are doing here in Oregon is the best in the country and we should be proud."

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde hosted the summit, which rotates among the Tribes on an annual basis. Approximately 275 people attended the event.

The summit opened with the Grand Ronde Honor Guard bringing in the colors, followed by members of the Grand Ronde Tribal Council and representatives from Oregon's other eight Tribes.

Drumming and singing was led by Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier, Cultural Resources Manager David Harrelson, Cultural Education Coordinator Jordan Mercier, Cultural Education Specialist Brian Krehbiel, Interpretive Coordinator Travis Stewart, Prevention Coordinator Cristina Lara and Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark.

Michael Rondeau of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians sang "The Star Spangled Banner" and Klamath Tribal Chairman Don Gentry gave the invocation.

Grand Ronde Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy welcomed attendees to the summit.

"We have been a great nation and appreciate all of the work done by our state agencies," she said. "Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedules to come here and talk to Tribal leaders in the spirit of consultation. ... Before you make a decision in your planning processes, (continue to) invite Tribes to the table."

In that spirit, representatives from each Tribal Council sat on couches at the main stage with Brown in the middle. In the audience were Tribal representatives, employees, heads of various state agencies and elected officials.

General Manager David Fullerton, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, Finance Officer Chris Leno and Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez were among the high-level Grand Ronde staff members who attended.

"Before Oregon was here, we Tribal people occupied these lands," Ken-



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

nedy said. "Termination in the 1950s was directed at our Tribal nations from the federal level, so there is lots of tumultuous history between Tribes and the United States. ... It caught us all in a struggle and this continues today, but we're a dedicated people who set our hearts on a goal. We are taking care of our land and each other. ... Building this nation has been a lot of hard work, but a lot has been done."

Kennedy touched on how climate change is affecting different areas, but that Tribal people have always known how to take care of the land and the animals on it.

"Our ways of preserving our natural resources are good ways," she said. "For decades, Tribes have been trying to impress upon the powers that be that there is a way to take care of this land. Hopefully, our ideas can be fully included so we can prevent the devastation seen in the state of California."

Brown spoke about the recent successes of the government-to-government consultation process, which include integrating Tribal history into school curriculums and the implementation of the Tribal Cultural Items Task Force, which is overseeing the process of getting state agencies, and eventually universities and public schools, to see what items they have on display or in storage that may be associated with Oregon Tribes, and discuss the most appropriate place for those items.

During the afternoon session, Cultural Items Task Force members hosted a panel discussion and updated summit attendees about their work. Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Michael Langley and Historic Preservation Manager Briece Edwards were panel members. Others included representatives from the Coquille, Siletz, Burns Paiute and Warm Springs Tribes, and Willamette University, University of Oregon and Oregon



Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. talks with Gov. Kate Brown during the annual Tribal-State Government-to-Government Summit held at Spirit Mountain Casino on Tuesday, Nov. 27. At left, Tribal Council member Michael Langley takes part in the Cultural Items Task Force discussion during the annual Tribal-State Government-to-Government Summit held at Spirit Mountain Casino on Tuesday, Nov. 27.



Department of Fish and Wildlife officials.

The message: There is no timeline to cultural items. These include past, present and future items and can range from military records to old photographs to hair. Culture is not just something you do; it is something that you are.

"What we have now is an opportunity to recognize the expertise that Tribes have in this area, and how they can help facilitate state agencies in trying to understand those items are not just stones and bones," Edwards said. "They include documents, imagery and records. This is a great opportunity for Tribes and agencies to move forward in building relationships."

Langley said it has taken time to build momentum after Termination, when there was a generational break in the culture.

He gave examples of taking three-dimensional images of the 16 Summers Collection items, on loan from the British Museum to the Chachalu Museum & Cultural Center until May. The items were collected from Grand Ronde shortly after the Reservation was established in the 1800s.

"This gives us the opportunity to look at how our ancestors made these items," he said. "Reclaiming

these processes is important."

Langley also talked about how a photo of an ancestor fishing from a platform at Willamette Falls in the late 19th century was recently obtained after it was shown as part of a lecture at the Tribe's History & Culture Summit held in October.

"That picture had been lost to us," Langley said. "But we were able to reconnect with that. ... These are the things that help our children see themselves as Tribal people and we are able to learn from those things. We can't wait to see what else is out there."

After the panel discussion concluded, a "table talk" was held on the meaning of cultural items and what public entities may have in their possession.

Brown said learning about the connection between secular and sacred items was something that would stay in her memory.

"I know the finish line for this work never really comes," she said. "We will continue to provide staffing for the task force through (at least) this year."

The summit closed with an invocation by Grand Ronde Tribal Elder and Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. and the retiring of the flags.

Kennedy thanked all of the Tribal representatives who traveled to attend, as well as Brown for staying the entire summit.

"I raise my hands to all of you," she said. "This is work that we think about long after others have gone to bed." ■