

# ‘You are the unsung heroes of this great nation’



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

**Dental Receptionist Whitney VanArsdel helps a veteran during the second day of the Veterans Summit: Gathering of Warriors held at úyxat Powwow Grounds on Friday, July 12.**



**From left, Willimina Veterans of Foreign Wars Post Commander Louis Rober, James Rober and Todd Swanson go through the food line before the start of the second day of the Veterans Summit: Gathering of Warriors held at úyxat Powwow Grounds on Friday, July 12.**

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gender-based sweats and sharing circles.

The bulk of the Veterans Summit occurred on Friday with Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr., a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran, welcoming perhaps the most attendees ever to a summit. Eighty-six people registered this year and Social Services Director Dana Ainam said she thought more people were in attendance than in previous years.

“You are appreciated more than you can ever know,” Bobb said before giving the invocation. “You are the unsung heroes of this great nation. ... We hope this event will bring you peace and a sense of healing.”

Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs Director Kelly Fitzpatrick called the powwow grounds a “fabulous venue” and said that events like the Veterans Summit help her small department aid the more than 300,000 veterans in the state. “Our partnerships are indispensable,” she said.

Terry Bentley (Karuk), a 32-year employee with the federal Veterans Affairs Department and regular Veterans Summit participant, thanked the Grand Ronde Tribe for continuing to host the summit and announced that her federal department is forming a Tribal Veterans Advisory Committee that will give

Native American veterans a seat at the table with a direct link to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Tailfeathers and Air Force veteran Linda Woods (Ottawa/Chippewa) performed the traditional POW/MIA ceremony to remember those who never returned from America’s military conflicts.

Woods also brought her eagle staff, which she recently took to Normandy in France and visited five D-Day beaches.

Friday events also concentrated on one of the main goals of the Veterans Summit – getting veterans the benefits that they earned from their military service.

A Veterans Affairs panel discussion featured Fitzpatrick, VA Portland Women Veterans Program Manager Sarah Suniga, VA Portland Primary Care Division Director Valdez Bravo, National Cemetery Administration representative Jeff Applegate and Veterans Benefit Administration Public Contact Team Coach Kurtis Harris.

After lunch, scheduled breakout sessions covered such nuts-and-bolts issues as disability compensation claims, spousal and dependent benefits and a Tribal veteran representative workshop.

Surrounding the powwow grounds dancing circle also were a variety of resource tables that included Grand Ronde Health & Wellness employees offering free dental checkups and supplies. In addition, the Tribe’s mobile diabe-



tes clinic was in attendance and the Tribe’s Emergency Management staff were on hand.

Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran Reyn Leno, who committed the Tribe to hosting the Veterans Summit in 2012 while he was on Tribal Council, said the seventh

summit was well-attended and remains worthwhile.

“I always walk away from this saying if you help one veteran in the two days you do up here, then it’s a success,” Leno said. “If you can change a person’s life just doing this type of stuff, it’s a success for me because getting veterans to come forward is difficult. Usually it is their families doing it for them, not them. If we can help one veteran change his life and get what he has coming, I think it is a success.” ■



**Jewell Lamb (Gros Ventre) talks with Army veteran Marci Vertner of Dallas during the 30-second game on the first day of the Veterans Summit: Gathering of Warriors held on Thursday, July 11.**



**Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs Director Kelly Fitzpatrick was part of a Veterans Affairs panel discussion with, from left, VA Portland Primary Care Division Director Valdez Bravo, VA Portland Women Veterans Program Manager Sarah Suniga, National Cemetery Administration representative Jeff Applegate and Veterans Benefit Administration Public Contact Team Coach Kurtis Harris on the second day of the Veterans Summit.**