

Willamina, Sheridan school districts keeping students fed

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

With all schools in Oregon closed through at least Monday, April 27, several districts have implemented a free lunch program to ensure students receive adequate nutrition until classes resume.

The Willamina School District is offering free sack lunches at seven different locations, with four in Grand Ronde. When in session, Willamina schools qualify for a grant that feeds every child for free with no applications process, said Superintendent Carrie Zimbrick.

On Wednesday, March 18, a handful of children were waiting at Raven Loop Park in Tribal Housing for their meals, while some parents chose to drive up and get the lunches to go. Lunch is available there Monday through Friday from 11 to 11:30 a.m.

Willamina School District cook Rebecca Snowden said that more children have been showing up with each passing day since the service started on Monday, March 16.

"We served 96 lunches in Grand Ronde yesterday," she says. "Everyone seems really thankful to be getting these."

Wednesday's sack lunch selections included peanut butter and jelly or ham and cheese sandwiches, celery sticks, fruit, crackers and milk. Everything was pre-bagged to minimize contact and potential spread of the novel coronavirus.

"I love my job and being able to feed kids," Snowden says. "We will continue to do so through the school closure."



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Rebecca Snowden, left, and Courtney Mendenhall, both cooks for the Willamina School District, hand out bag lunches to children in Tribal Housing on Wednesday, March 18. The school district will be providing the lunches for the duration of the school closures, which are currently scheduled to last at least until April 28.

Fifth-graders Issac Emery, Kayden Zimmer and Nacoma Liebelt agreed that the extra time away from school was "nice," but that it was also good they live close to their friends.

"We've been playing outside a lot," Emery says. "And going to my grandma's house."

Zimmer says he is required to do

two pages of homework every day and then he gets to go outside.

"It's been nice and I enjoy getting the lunches," he says.

The Willamina School District also started adding breakfasts to the sacks on Monday, March 30.

Other Grand Ronde locations where lunch is served are River's Edge RV Park from 10:30 to

10:45 a.m., Chachalu Museum & Cultural Center from 11:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and Wandering Spirit RV Park from 12:30 to 12:45 p.m.

Willamina locations are Willamina Elementary School from 10:30 to 11 a.m., Tina Miller Park from 11 to 11:30 a.m. and the Willamina Post Office 11:45 to 12:15 p.m.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown ordered all K-12 schools to close for two weeks between Monday, March 16, and Monday, March 30, on Thursday, March 12, to stem the spread of the virus. That was later extended to Monday, April 27.

The 852-student Willamina School District is approximately 40 percent Native American with many of those students either being Grand Ronde Tribal

members or descendants.

The Sheridan School District is also serving free lunches during the closure. The lunches can be obtained at Sheridan High School and Faulconer-Chapman School from noon to 12:30 p.m., Sheridan City Park from noon to 12:15 p.m. and the Sheridan City Library from 12:20 to 12:35 p.m. ■

Grand Ronde Station is remaining open

MEETING continued
from front page

Tribal Attorney Rob Greene said during the Legislative Action Committee meeting that the two moves will help prepare the Tribal for all financial contingencies.

Tribal Council member Michael Langley said he thought the line of credit resolution was a "good move" because interest rates are very low currently.

Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. said he wanted the membership to know it was a unanimous council decision regarding the two financial items.

The Tribe moved to close its primary economic engine, Spirit Mountain Casino, from Thursday, March 19, through Thursday, April 9.

During the Legislative Action Committee meeting, Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said the Tribe is working diligently on emergency management protocols to keep coronavirus at bay and out of the community. The Tribe has established an emergency management control center in the Community Center to monitor developments.

The regimen includes daily cleaning at the government campus buildings, as well as practicing social distancing – staying at least

6 feet away from other people – and limiting crowds to 10 or fewer people.

Kennedy also said the current state of affairs involves spiritual warfare vs. fear and panic. "We have faith that our Creator will keep this all in order," she said.

A late addition to the Tribal Council agenda was declaring a state of emergency at the Tribe. The resolution allows General Manager David Fullerton to oversee the Tribal response to the pandemic and use Tribal resources to respond and recover from its effects.

Fullerton said the emergency declaration allows the Tribe to launch mutual aid agreements if necessary, provides the Tribe access to federal assistance and gives the Tribe access to federal resources, such as essential personal protection equipment for Tribal health professionals who are on the front lines in the battle against the virus. It is the first time the Tribe has declared a state of emergency since its 1983 Restoration as a federally recognized Tribe.

"The COVID-19 outbreak is constantly changing. This declaration allows us to seek the help of our partners in a time where working together is key to stopping the spread of COVID-19," Kennedy said. "We need to come together as a community. We need to check

on one another, make sure our Elders are taken care of, and use our strength as a community to see each other through this challenging time."

Fullerton added that the Tribe has established a phone number – 503-879-4357 (HELP) – for Tribal members to call between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday if they need nonmedical aid, such as replenishing supplies or groceries. Those with medical problems should still call their primary care physician.

Grand Ronde Station adjacent to Spirit Mountain Casino is remaining open to help the community and Grand Ronde Food Bank Coordinator Francene Ambrose said food distribution dates are moving to Fridays only in April with modifications to the distribution process to help fight spread of the virus.

In addition, Tribal Council reminded members that the Sunday, April 5, General Council meeting scheduled in Eugene has been canceled.

Although the situation is serious, Kennedy said she is confident the Tribe will get through the crisis.

"I want our Tribal members to be healthy," she said. "We will continue to thrive. ... The most precious thing in life is our life."

The agenda also included:

- Approval of 24 non-infant appli-

cations for enrollment into the Tribe because the applicants meet the requirements outlined in the Tribal Constitution and Enrollment Ordinance;

- Approved a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation regarding Scroggins Dam, which is an earthen structure built on the Tualatin River for irrigation, water supply and flood control. The dam impounds the water that makes up Henry Haag Lake near Forest Grove and there are concerns about its seismic stability;

- Approved the Tribal Housing Department's 2019 Annual Performance Report that must be submitted to the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department's Office of Native American Programs. The Tribe received more than \$3 million in HUD funding in the 2019 fiscal year;

- And approved the 115-acre Cheechako Logging Unit as presented by Natural Resources staff that will earn the Tribe an estimated \$2.13 million in net revenue. "Cheechako" is Chinuk Wawa for "newcomer."

The entire meeting can be viewed by signing on the Tribal government website at www.grandronde.org and clicking on the Government tab and then Videos. ■