

## Police Department has non-emergency text line

The Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department has created a non-emergency text line at 541-921-2927.

“Even though this is mostly designed for children, I don’t want adults thinking that they can’t use it as well. If you have a non-emergency situation or question, feel free to contact my officer via text through this line,” said Grand Ronde Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight. “When one of my officers receives the text, they will call you back when they have time.”

McKnight said that emergency situations still require calling 911. For more information, contact McKnight at 503-879-1474. ■



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

**A maintenance worker loads up a piece of equipment outside of the shuttered Spirit Mountain Casino on Friday, March 20. The casino closed on Thursday, March 19, and preliminary estimates project having the casino and its approximately 1,100 employees being idle through Thursday, April 9.**

## ‘We pride ourselves as being a caring community’

**CLOSURE continued from front page**

Preliminary estimates projected having the casino and its approximately 1,100 employees being idle beginning at midnight Thursday, March 19, through Thursday, April 9.

The closing of Spirit Mountain Casino followed a Monday, March 16, announcement by the Cowlitz Tribe that it was closing its Ridgefield, Wash., casino, Ilani, through the end of March. The Cowlitz announced that they would comply with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee’s order shutting down restaurants, bars and entertainment venues.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced similar restaurant and bar restrictions during a press conference held Monday, March 16, in Portland. When asked about the state’s Tribal casinos, she said that she did not have the authority to close them because they are operated by sovereign nations.

“I would ask that our Tribal leadership of our nine federally recognized Tribes be working with their local health authorities in making the appropriate decisions to protect the health and safety of Oregonians,” Brown said.

“We pride ourselves as being a caring community that views every

individual that walks through our doors as a member of the Grand Ronde family,” Dillon said. “The casino staff has done an outstanding job protecting everyone through preventive measures, but the continued growth of COVID-19 in Oregon has made this closure necessary.”

“These unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures and we all have to do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19,” Kennedy said.

Spirit Mountain Casino opened in October 1995 and has been the primary funding source for Tribal governmental operations and myriad benefits to Tribal members, including health care, Elders’ pensions, per capita payments and educational funding. It also was Oregon’s No. 1 tourist destination for a time and became one of the largest employers in Yamhill and Polk counties.

Tribal Council authorized an additional 120 hours – three weeks – of paid time off for all casino and government employees. For casino employees, the Tribe is paying their standard rate with additional consideration for tips.

The Siletz Tribe, which operates Chinook Winds Casino in Lincoln City, also closed down their gaming facility. ■

## Tribe receives \$35,500 state grant to help fund COVID-19 response

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

The Oregon Health Authority announced on Sunday, March 22, that the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde will receive \$35,500 to help fund its response to the virus.

The funds are part of \$4 million being distributed to local public health authorities and Tribes.

The funds can be used to support reporting, monitoring and controlling of COVID-19 in communities, identifying and screening of contacts to COVID-19 positive patients and education, prevention and related communications activities to share information with the public and community partners.

“We believe that those funds will have a significant positive impact on our state’s capacity to perform COVID-19 response functions at the local level,” said Oregon Health Authority Director Patrick Allen.

“Honoring the government-to-government relationship is important in our coordinated response to COVID-19,” said Julie Johnson, director of Tribal Affairs at the Oregon Health Authority. “We are appreciative of this funding to provide support at the local level. We know everyone is working extremely hard to protect all of our communities across the state.”

Other Tribes receiving the same amount of funding are the Warm

Springs, Burns Paiute, Siletz, Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, Klamath, Coquille and Cow Creek. The Umatilla Tribe, which reported a positive coronavirus case at its casino, will receive \$40,500.

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, however, said the state funds will be spent rapidly and that the federal government is not fulfilling its trustee role with Native American Tribes.

“I’ve participated on calls to the White House. They are our trustee,” Kennedy said during an interview with KLCC radio. “There have been appropriations identified for Tribes, yet we have not received a dollar yet. And I’m not saying that we won’t. Every Tribe has a federal ID number. There’s the mechanism. Cut the red tape, get the funds out now.”

Kennedy said the Tribal Health Clinic has a lab that would be used to help screen and test potential cases among its Tribal members.

“If there’s something Native people know all too well, it’s what epidemics have done to us in the past,” she said.

At this time, the Tribal government remains operative with a minimum of staff reporting to work at the Governance Center in Grand Ronde. Tribal members needing information and assistance are encouraged to call or e-mail; walk-ins are strongly discouraged. ■

## Health Clinic receives help during crisis

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

The Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center and its employees are on the frontlines in the effort to protect the Tribe and Grand Ronde community from COVID-19, the novel coronavirus.

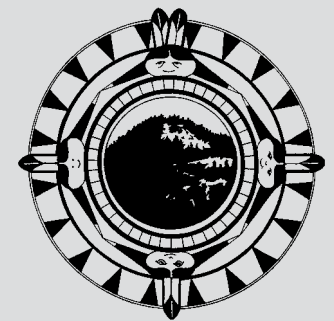
And when they’ve asked for help over the last couple of weeks, they have received it.

Initially, Lab Manager Teresa Larson asked Tribal employees on Thursday, March 19, if they had any Styrofoam coolers to donate so the lab could send patient samples to the State Health Lab.

By Tuesday, March 24, the Lab was well-stocked and no longer in need of more donations, she said.

Larson said 15 coolers were donated and another 16 were ordered by the Tribe to fill the need. In addition, the Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center at the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation outside of Pendleton donated 260 N95 masks to the Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center.

“Our Oregon Health Authority liaison, Carey Palm, has been keeping close contact with the nine Oregon Tribes,” said Emergency Operations Coordinator Steve Warden. “When Carey received word we were in need of



N95 masks, she reached out and was able to arrange availability of 260 N95s from Yellowhawk Health Center.”

Warden picked them up on Friday, March 20, from Umatilla Fire Captain Tony Cooke and delivered the masks to Grand Ronde.

N95 masks are used to protect the wearer from airborne particles and from liquid contaminating the face.

“Our Emergency Services Program is part of a coalition of the nine Oregon Tribal Emergency Management Programs,” Warden said. “The coalition gives one more resource when a disaster or emergency strikes other Tribes. I think it’s great the way we all work together to support our communities.”

Warden added that the Siletz Tribe also provided Grand Ronde with approximately 100 N95 masks as a result of the same outreach. ■