

Parade of caring: Teachers drive through Tribal housing

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

Staff from Willamina Elementary School demonstrated that even though they will have to spend the remainder of the school year teaching remotely, connecting with their students remains a priority.

On Monday, April 13, 45 cars filled with staff members and their families participated in a parade through Willamina and Grand Ronde to kick off distance learning by seeing students and their families, and hopefully bringing some cheer to their day.

Near the entrance to Grand Ronde Tribal Housing, several children and their parents gathered to watch the parade, some holding signs that read “We Miss You” and “Thank You For All You Do.”

Sandi Conklin and her five children, ages 3 to 13, were in attendance.

“The kids are starting to get a little stir crazy,” she said. “But they have been reading, doing their math and coloring. Trying to keep them entertained has been a challenge.”

Conklin said she was happy that Willamina staff members were taking the time to drive out to Grand Ronde and encourage students.

“I think it’s great,” she said. “My kids have talked about missing school and their teachers.”



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Willamina Elementary School first-grade teacher Shannon Mode waves while holding a sign while taking part in a parade with other teachers and staff members from Willamina Elementary School through Tribal Housing to support their students staying at home due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic on Monday, April 13. From left, Angel Mathews, 7, Kalea Liebelt, 8, Bonnie'Lee Mathews, 2, and Ky-Mani Zimmer, 5, wait for a parade of teachers and staff members.



Haven Conklin, 8, doesn’t miss getting up early for school, but does miss other parts.

“I miss my friends and my math class,” she said. “I’ve been spending time with my family, playing video games with my brothers and cud-

ding with my mom.”
Eighth-grader Ethan Sabin said

he is disappointed that he won’t be participating in fun, end-of-the-year activities like dances and eighth-grade promotion.

“It really sucks,” he said. “I’m missing my friends and my teachers.”

The parade began at Willamina Elementary School at 10 a.m. with a Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department escort led by Police Chief Jake McKnight and Lt. Tim Hernandez and two West Valley Fire District fire trucks. Tribal General Manager David Fullerton and Tribal Council member Lisa Leno rode in one fire truck and waved to students.

Several of the teachers festooned their vehicles with Willamina school colors of orange and black, or held signs with messages such as “Stay Strong, Stay Healthy,” “We Miss You” and “We Love Our Students.”

Children waved with excitement and several parents recorded the parade on their cell phones.

“Everyone misses the students. They are the driving force behind choosing to work at a school,” Willamina School District Superintendent Carrie Zimbrick said. “Distance learning just can’t replace the daily face-to-face time with kids. The parade is an opportunity to see our students’ faces and let them know we miss them and care for them.”

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced on Wednesday, April 8, that students will not be returning to classrooms for the remainder of the school year to help stem the spread of coronavirus in the state. ■



FREE CONCEALED CARRY CLASS

FOR CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF GRAND RONDE TRIBAL MEMBERS

The Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department will be sponsoring Tribal Members to attend a free virtual concealed carry class on April 17th at 1PM. This class exceeds the requirements to apply for an Oregon Concealed Handgun License.

Topics covered include: Self defense law, How to obtain a license, Situational awareness, Handgun selection, Holster considerations, Handgun safety and much more!

You will be able to participate in this class from the comfort and safety of your home with a computer or smart device.

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