

Kennedy worked 15 years as the Tribe's health director

**SERVICE continued
from front page**

low Tribal Council members to the chairmanship for 13 of her more than 21 years on council.

In between her years serving on Tribal Council, Kennedy worked for 15 years as the Tribe's health director, guiding the construction of the 40,000-square-foot Health & Wellness Center, and served as executive director of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

Kennedy sat down with *Smoke Signals* Editor Dean Rhodes on Tuesday, April 21, to discuss her record-setting years of Tribal Council service to the Grand Ronde Tribe. Excerpts of that 36-minute interview are below.

Q. Has the time gone by quickly or not? Did you realize you were even getting close to setting a record?

Kennedy: It's something that I don't really think about a lot. For me, I have often been asked, "Wow, Grand Ronde has developed so fast!" That's not my feeling about it. It's slow. Serving even during the Termination era on council, we talked about a lot of the thoughts, the ideas, the dreams, the direction the Tribe should go. Laying the foundational pieces so that when we were ready, we could launch forward. So my history has been a lot longer than that, and so from that perspective I don't think things have moved as quickly as I thought, but I know things take time and planning processes, availability of funds ... all of that plays into how fast you develop and move. For me, personally, I have always been on the sovereignty piece. I'm dedicated to making sure that we stand as a sovereign nation. I was always interested, and still am, in getting the foundational pieces for what a sovereign government does.

Q. What are the biggest differences that you see between how Tribal Council operated in the 1980s and how it operates today?

Kennedy: At that time, it was really following the direction of the Grand Ronde Restoration Act, and that was moving forward with securing our first land base and deliberating on what the Tribe should have returned to it. It was a lot of that work and it was meeting with officials, meeting with civic groups, meeting with the federal agencies to determine what lands and making excursions to various sites to see what land base we would acquire. That was kind of a single focus.

The biggest difference that I see is that there is a lot more of what we do now. I think about it as multi-tasking. I have had log truck drivers in my family ... and they are often shifting gears. That is how it feels now. You're always shifting gears. Oftentimes during the day, you're dealing with maybe a fishing



Smoke Signals file photos

Grand Ronde Tribal Court Judge Katherine English, left, welcomed the Tribe's recently elected Tribal Council members Ed Pearsall, Cheryle A. Kennedy and Jan Reibach in 2000. She has served on Tribal Council ever since.



Tribal Council member Cheryle A. Kennedy gives the invocation to open the Senate session at the State Capitol in June 2013.

to do things in a different way, and at that time the health clinic was established as a health authority, which creates autonomy. We had a board set up and I'm not sure if there was dissension, but I thought, "I didn't work this hard to bring a quality health care delivery system to our people to have it either disbanded or to be piecemealed out." If that's the case, I'll bow out, and it just so happened that the executive director position at the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board became available and I thought that I would apply for that. It was very competitive, but I was selected. I took that job and worked there for quite two years.

In December ... I have family who live over in central Oregon; some near the Warm Springs Reservation and some on it. I was going there for Christmas to take presents over to my sisters and on the way back and I know after years of driving over the mountains, you kind of know you have to get over the mountain when the opportune time is. I knew I had to get out of that area before 4 o'clock because the sun would be going down and it would become icy. But it happened earlier and there was a head-on collision.

I had my grandson, who was 11

years old at the time. It was ... you hear the phrase you see your life flash before your eyes and that really happened to me. And I knew the options weren't great. I was skidding across the ice and I had no brakes and as I was going across the road I saw the headlights of another car coming at me. I thought, "What's worse? Hitting head-on or going over the cliff?" I would rather stay in our lane, but that wasn't happening. I just cried out in me, "God help us!" And the last thing I thought was that I have lived my life, but spare my grandson.

When I survived it, I didn't feel like I would survive it because when we hit and that huge explosion and I felt my body break. I had like 29 different bones that were broken during the crash. I was surprised that I lived. ... But the astonishing thing about all of that was that my life was spared for a reason. In my mind, I thought, "Maybe things have to change for me."

That was in December. It took me a few months to recover and about three, four surgeries later. I always came to General Council meetings, but during that time I was laid up. But I came to the General Council meeting and someone nominated me. I don't even remember who it was. I kind of thought, "No, I don't want to do that. I don't think I should." But something in me, I felt like I was being pushed to accept it. ... So I said, "I accept" and I was elected. It was time to serve in a different way.

Q. Let me just run a couple numbers by you. I know it is difficult to talk about yourself, but I am going to ask you to do that. You have received more than 3,800 votes during your runs for Tribal Council. You hold the record for receiving the most votes in an election at 712. You have been the No. 1 recipient of votes five out of the last seven times you have run for council. What is it about you and how your conduct yourself as a Tribal Council member that elicits that kind of support?

Kennedy: Going through my years of higher education that is a question that has always been

**SEE SERVICE
continued on page 9**



Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy presents Wilma Mankiller and her husband, Charlie Soap, with gifts during a welcoming ceremony held at the University of Oregon's Many Nations Longhouse in October 2005.