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Five seeking seats on Tribal Council

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Three Tribal Council incumbents and two challengers are up for election in September in the smallest field of candidates to ever seek election since 1983's Restoration.

Vice Chair Chris Mercier, 44, is seeking his sixth term on the Grand Ronde Tribe's nine-member governing body. Michael Langley, 53, and Lisa Leno, 51, are seeking their second term.

They, along with their challengers, were nominated during a General Council meeting held Sunday, June 28, in the Atrium of the Governance Center.

Challengers Reyn Leno and Peter Grout, who both ran in 2019, also are looking to capture a seat on Tribal Council.

Mercier was first elected to Tribal Council in 2004 and was re-elected in 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2017. He received the most votes in '07 and '10. He took one year off during that time to attend law school at Michigan State University and just graduated from law school at Lewis & Clark College in Portland.

His 15 years on Tribal Council ties him with former Tribal Council Chairman Mark Mercier

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Heat waves



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

From left, Aubrey Campbell, 7, Taylor Ruggles, 8, and Carter Campbell, 6, cool off from 80-degree heat in a kiddie pool in Tribal Housing on Monday, June 22. Temperatures in the Grand Ronde area hovered in the 80- to 90-degree range during the last full week of June as summer finally arrived in western Oregon.

Native Americans discuss how to support Black Lives Matter effort

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

PORTLAND — It started with a simple text message. Jason Umtuch (Warm Springs) reached out to his friend JR Lilly (Navajo) to see how they could help support Black Lives Matter protestors in Portland.

Lilly is the past Native American Youth and Family Center's Civic Engagement coordinator and currently works for the city of Portland. Umtuch has struggled in the past with drugs and alcohol, but is now active in the Wellbriety Movement, which emphasizes culturally based healing.

"I had a vision of bringing our culture out to the community, to create a safe place for people of color," Umtuch said. "A Tribal Elder wanted to get dancers and singers to come downtown to Pioneer Courthouse Square and support BLM. We didn't want to

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Photo courtesy of JR Lilly

Siletz Tribal member Athena Shepherd Rilatos joins Native American community members and leaders in downtown Portland to stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement on Friday, June 5.

Tribal Council reverses course on election changes

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

In response to critical comments from the membership, Tribal Council and the Tribe's Election Board reversed a June 10 decision to hold the 2020 Tribal Council election as essentially an all-mail election and return to business as usual.

During its June 10 meeting, Tribal Council approved an emergency amendment to the Election Ordinance that would have closed the polling location in the Community Center and required Tribal members to vote by absentee ballot in an effort to protect voting Elders and Elders serving on the Election Board from the COVID-19 coronavirus.

During the 2019 Tribal Council election, 143 Tribal members cast in-person ballots in the Community Center and three Tribal members registered to vote on Election Day.

But those changes were re-

versed on Wednesday, June 24, and the 2020 Tribal Council election will be held as it usually has been in previous years with walk-in voting and registration available on Election Day, which will be Saturday, Sept. 12.

The only amendment approved by Tribal Council on June 10 that will remain in place is a reduction of Election Board office hours in the Community Center from 20 hours to 15 hours per week.

Tribal Senior Staff Attorney Deleen Aubertin Keller said during the Tuesday, June 23, Legislative Action Committee hearing that the Election Board will institute COVID-19 precautions during Election Day, such as cleaning and disinfecting voting booths after every use.

General Manager David Fullerton said the Tribe's Facilities Department will work with the

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