

Election Board encouraging voters to mail in ballots ASAP

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Changes at the U.S. Postal Service, such as disappearing mail boxes and the dismantling of high-speed sorters, are prompting concern that Grand Ronde voters who live in 43 states and six foreign countries may be disenfranchised if they hold on to their Sept. 12 Tribal Council election ballots for too long.

Tribal voters who plan to vote by mail, which an overwhelming majority do, probably should make up their minds and get their ballot in the mail pronto.

The Election Board met on Tuesday, Aug. 18, to discuss election matters, as well as how the Postal Service mail delivery slowdown will affect the Tribal Council election.

"The Election Board has been communicating with the local Grand Ronde post office on a regular basis and there is no indication that our local service has become delayed because of changes within the U.S. Postal Service," Election Board Chair DeAnne Johnston said. "Elections are the cornerstone to a healthy government and every vote counts."

"If Tribal members have concerns about a possible delay, we'd encourage you to complete and return your ballot by mail as soon as possible, or deliver your ballots by hand to a drop box located at the Governance Center, or vote in person on Sept. 12 at the Community Center."

During the 2019 election, 2,659 ballots were mailed out. Of the 1,350 ballots that were eventually cast, 89.4 percent arrived in the mail. This year's ballots were mailed on July 29 and ballots that arrive after Saturday, Sept. 12, will

Mail-in ballots during the last five Tribal Council elections

Year	Ballots cast	Mailed	Pct.
2019	1,350	1,207	89.4
2018	1,278	1,146	89.7
2017	1,369	1,231	89.9
2016	1,309	1,148	87.7
2015	1,151	1,041	90.4



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

The Grand Ronde Election Board is encouraging Tribal Council voters to mail their ballots in as early as possible as delays nationwide have been reported with the U.S. Postal Service.

not count in the election.

In addition, the Grand Ronde post office is no longer open on Saturdays, so ballots need to arrive by Friday, Sept. 11, to find their way into the Tribe's post office box in time.

This year, Tribal voters are choos-

ing from the smallest field of candidates for Tribal Council since 1983's Restoration. Incumbents Chris Mercier, Michael Langley and Lisa Leno are being challenged by former Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno and Peter Grout, the son of longtime Tribal Council member Valarene Grout.

For the fourth consecutive year, Tribal members also are being asked to weigh in on advisory vote questions. The five questions seek opinions on removing the parent on the roll at time of birth enrollment

requirement, building a walking path from Grand Meadows to Spirit Mountain Casino, increasing Tribal investments in environmental stewardship, allowing electronic voting and evaluating the need for a child care center in Grand Ronde.

Controversy regarding the Postal Service erupted in mid-August when social media posts showed mail boxes being removed in Portland and Eugene and Postal Service employees disclosed the dismantling of the high-speed sorters.

Critics claim that Postmaster General Louis DeJoy is seeking to suppress the vote in the Nov. 3 General Election while Trump administration officials defend the moves as necessary cost-saving measures because the Postal Service is losing money.

Tribal voters who live within driving distance of Grand Ronde can vote in person between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 12, in the Tribal Community Center, 9615 Grand Ronde Road. In 2019, 143 Tribal members voted in person.

This year, COVID-19 prevention protocols will be in place to protect voters and Election Board workers.

Johnston said there will be three voting booths with proper spacing between them to allow for social distancing. Voting booths will be disinfected after every use and only three people will be allowed in the building at one time. "As one exits out the side door, another one will be let in," she said.

In addition, temperatures will be taken at the front door and face masks will be required to be worn at all times when in the Community Center.

There also is a ballot drop box located in the Governance Center.

The Tribe's Election Board office in the Community Center is open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday through Sept. 11. The office can be contacted at 503-879-2271. ■

Certified Application Assisters at the Health & Wellness Center

Cassandra Rhamey is available to assist with recertification and applications for the Oregon Health Plan.

She can be reached at 503-879-1359 or cassandra.rhamey@grandronde.org.

Leah Bailey also is a Certified Application Assister available to help. She can be reached at 503-879-2197 or leah.bailey@grandronde.org. ■

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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," said Grand Ronde Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight. McKnight said that emergency situations still require calling 911. For more information, contact McKnight at 503-879-1474. ■

Community Health Program

Medical Transport Services

Medical transportation services are available to Tribal members within the six-county service area when an alternate means of transportation is not available. Advance notice required.

Please call 503-879-2078 to schedule a reservation.

