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Community Fund nears \$85 million mark in giving

By Danielle Harrison

Smoke Signals staff writer

Spirit Mountain Community Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, has awarded millions in nonprofit grants since it was formed in 1997.



Michael Cherry

In total, the Community Fund distributed \$697,323 in grants to 15 nonprofits and to eight of the nine Oregon Tribes for the fourth quarter, bringing the total giving in the past 23 years to \$84.97 million.

In accordance with the Tribe's gaming compact with the state of Oregon, the fund awards 6 percent of net income from Spirit Mountain Casino in grants. It is governed by an eight-member Board of Trustees.

The number of grants awarded since 1997 is 2,908. Grants have been distributed to nonprofit organizations in 11 northwest Oregon counties for the purposes of supporting education, health, arts and culture, environment, historic preservation, public safety and problem gaming, and to the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon under a Tribal Grants program.

Due to the pandemic, the in-person check presentation ceremony on the Tribal campus has been canceled until further notice. Community Fund Director Michael Cherry has said she is confident that the giving will continue in 2021, although it may look different due to Spirit Mountain Casino being closed for 74 days in 2020. The casino sets aside a portion of its annual earnings for charitable donations through the Community Fund.

Going forward, the focus of the Community Fund and its board is on marginalized communities who already faced struggles and lacked access to services before the pandemic hit, although it will continue to provide support to nonprofits responding to challenges created by or worsened by the pandemic.

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Man arrested for allegedly starting blaze

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

OREGON CITY – Less than 24 hours after a three-alarm fire started at the former Blue Heron Paper Mill site on Saturday, Dec. 5, police made an arrest.

Enrique Omar Mejia, 29, was booked on three counts of felony second-degree arson and misdemeanor disorderly conduct and trespassing. He is being held on \$100,000 bail.

Oregon City police were called to the vacant property around 1:40 p.m. Saturday on a report of trespassing, law enforcement officials said.

The initial report was of a person throwing items from a window of a Blue Heron building. When officers arrived, they also saw items being thrown out and soon smoke was coming from the same area.

The Grand Ronde Tribe-owned site was the scene of intense firefighting activity on Saturday, Dec. 5, as fire crews sprayed a large volume of water to stop the fire from spreading.

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Contributed photo

Firefighters used large aerial ladders to fight a blaze at the Blue Heron Paper Mill site in Oregon City on Saturday, Dec. 5.



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Smoke rises from one of the buildings on the Tribally owned Blue Heron Paper Mill site on Sunday, Dec. 6.

Tribal Council OKs budget to buy property adjacent to Blue Heron

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Tribal Council approved a fifth supplemental budget for 2020 during its Wednesday, Dec. 2, meeting that will allocate \$1.235 million to purchase an approximately half-acre plot adjacent to the Blue Heron property in Oregon City.

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The Grand Ronde Tribe is in the final stages of closing on the property located at 450 Main St. in Oregon City.



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez