

College naming Welcome
Center after Grand Ronde
Chief Wacheno — pg. 6



FEBRUARY 1, 2021

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AN INDEPENDENT PUBLICATION OF THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF GRAND RONDE · SMOKE SIGNALS.ORG

Tribes receive good COVID-19 funding news

*Deadline to spend monies
extended until end of 2021*

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Native American Tribes nationwide received two good pieces of news in December and January regarding COVID-19 relief funding as the federal government transitioned to the new Biden administration.

Tribes received news on Dec. 12 that their deadline for spending Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act funding approved in March 2020 has been extended by a year to Dec. 31, 2021, as part of the Consolidated Appropriations 2021 Act that was signed into law.

The Grand Ronde Tribe received a combined \$44 million from the Treasury Department in three payments and \$1.56 million from the Department of the Interior in CARES Act funding.

The Tribe used approximately 42 percent of that emergency funding — \$19.3 million — to fund a COVID-19 Relief Payment program that sent a total of \$4,400 to each adult Tribal member in eight monthly payments from April through November.

The relief payments approved in March were designed to help Tribal members adversely affected by the nationwide economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of quarterly per capita payments in June and September after Spirit Mountain

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Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

LightWerks Communication Systems Inc. Lead AV installer Beau Krebsbach, left, and AV Installer Corey Nelson work on installing the second of two 85-inch televisions in the Tribal Council Chambers on Tuesday, Jan. 12. The new TVs are part of a major technological upgrade within the Governance Center.

Council Chambers 2.0

Technology upgrades allow full remote participation

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals staff writer

The Tribal Council Chambers and conference room have undergone significant technology upgrades in January that will allow the audience and Tribal Council members to more fully participate remotely

in meetings.

The upgrades, completed by LightWerks Communication Systems Inc. of Carson, Calif., cost \$182,000 and were paid for with Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act funds. The Tribe received \$45 million in emergency aid funding from the

federal government in 2020.

The meeting room improvements include a room scheduling system, an electronic sign to replace the bulletin board and a video conference system with

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On-time graduation rates dip for Native students

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals staff writer

High school graduation rates have decreased slightly for Native students overall in Oregon and at several local school districts.

According to numbers released by the Oregon Department of Education on Thursday, Jan. 21, Native American on-time graduation for 2020 is at 67.2 percent, down half a percentage point from the year before.

Local school districts also saw moderate dips, which officials say is not unexpected given the sudden pivot to distance learning that occurred in March 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic

**Willamina School District
plans Feb. 9 re-opening date**
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forced schools to close their doors to in-person instruction.

“I do think the lack of in-person instruction did impact some of our students,” Willamina School District Superintendent Carrie Zimbrick says. “We continue to work very closely with the Tribal Education Department to support students. The guided studies class has been a great resource for our Native students to access during the school

day for support.”

Native American on-time graduation at Willamina is at 83.7 percent for 2020, a decrease from 2019’s 88 percent, but still a significant increase from the 60 percent rate when the state began recording subgroup data in the 2008-09 school year.

Willamina has the largest Native American population in the area, with approximately 35 percent of students identifying as such, and most of those students being Grand Ronde Tribal members or descendants.

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