



Reibach releases  
26th album — pg. 9



# SMOKE SIGNALS

UMPQUA · MOLALLA · ROGUE RIVER · KALAPUYA · CHASTA

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

MARCH 15, 2021

## Recapping a year of COVID

*From unprecedented closures to mass vaccination clinics, Tribe persevered*



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

**Spirit Mountain Casino closed to the public in March 2020. The closure lasted until June 1.**

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

**O**n Feb. 28, 2020, the Oregon Health Authority reported the first case of COVID-19 in Oregon. Three days later, Tribal General Manager David Fullerton took the Tribe's first official act in response to the looming pandemic, suspending air travel for all employees through the end of March.

By March 8, the number of cases in Oregon had increased to 21 and Gov. Kate Brown declared a State of Emergency to combat the virus' spread.

Meanwhile, what would eventually become the last in-person Tribal gatherings occurred – the March 1 General Council meeting held in the Tribal Community Center, a Student Success Night held on March 5 in the Tribal gym

and the March 11 Spirit Mountain Community Fund check distribution held in the Governance Center Atrium.

On March 11, the Grand Ronde Tribe announced the postponement of the April 3-4 Agency Creek Round Dance and the upcoming Native Wellness Day.

Eight days later, on Thursday, March 19, the unthinkable occurred – Spirit Mountain Casino closed for what originally was thought would be three weeks, but eventually lasted 74 days until June 1. In addition, only “essential” governmental employees were allowed to work in the Governance Center.

See COVID

continued on pages 10-11

## Tribal government moves into third phase of re-opening

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

**T**he Grand Ronde Tribal government officially moved into its third phase of re-opening on Wednesday, March 10, said Human Resources Director Camille Mercier.

Phase 3 is a modification of employee restrictions, a continuation of limited public access to government campus facilities, allowing limited on-site meetings and visitors, and limited programming.

The Tribe closed to all but “essential” employees in mid-March 2020. It re-opened to most employees in May, but employees were required to undergo temperature checks, wear masks and keep socially distant from colleagues.

Mercier said the move to Phase 3 has been prompted by a variety of factors, including the Tribe being able to obtain sufficient personal protection equipment and testing supplies, and there being adequate contact tracing procedures in place.

Other factors contributing to the increased re-opening include the availability of vaccines and that more than 50 percent of Tribal government staff members have been vaccinated. More than 90 percent of the Tribal Health & Wellness Center staff members have been vaccinated, she added.

See PHASE 3  
continued on page 5

## ‘A blessing’

*Lodges help Elders regain a sense of purpose*

By Danielle Harrison

*Smoke-Signals staff writer*

**T**ribal Elder Larry Cole carefully carves out the beginnings of a raven rattle from cedar board, his hands steady and expression focused.

Beside him rests a walking stick with abalone accents that he made after moving into Adult Foster Care's Cougar Lodge in December.

Cole, 85, has been carving for several years. His work included creating elaborate totem poles for several neighbors, but recently he had stopped doing the hobby that once gave him joy. He sold or gave away his carving tools.

But after moving from his rural home in Glide to Grand Ronde, he has begun his woodworking hobby anew and re-focused.

Cole lives with four other Tribal Elders in a tight-knit community that has managed to flourish despite a global pandemic. Although he sometimes misses the peace and quiet that his former country home provided, he says he enjoys the camaraderie of other residents at



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

**Elder Larry Cole begins carving what will be a raven rattle at the Cougar Lodge on Tuesday, March 2. Living in the lodge has inspired Cole to restart his carving efforts.**

mealtimes, and helping the staff with various tasks like preparing and cleaning up after dinner.

“Everyone is very nice, both the residents and the caregivers,” he says. “I also like not having to worry about going to get groceries.”

Larry's daughter, Tribal Librarian Kathy Cole, was instrumental in convincing her father to give Elder care a chance.

“She had to twist my arm a bit,”

See LODGE  
continued on page 8