

Bobb speaks to McMinnville veterans group

By Danielle Harrison

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McMINNVILLE – Despite having their ancestral lands stolen and being forced to live on desolate and sometimes remote Reservations, Native Americans continue to serve their country in the largest percentages per capita of any ethnic group.

This commitment, along with the history of the Grand Ronde Tribe in Oregon, was the focus of Tribal Council member and Vietnam-era Marine Corps veteran Steve Bobb Sr.'s speech during a Thursday, July 1, event to the McMinnville chapter of the Band of Brothers veterans group at Evergreen Aviation Museum. The group is open to all veterans.

Bobb was originally scheduled to speak about the Tribe and Native Americans' military service in April 2020, but it was postponed more than a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 21 people attended the event, which was one of the first in-person meetings for the group since the pandemic began.

"Until 200 years ago, we were living in peace, going about the daily business of surviving the elements," Bobb said. "Then, the Oregon Territory was opened up to the white settlers with total disregard for the Indigenous people who occupied the lands for 10,000 years. ... With the advent of the white settler into the farmland of the Willamette Valley, and the overwhelming dominance of the U.S. Cavalry, my ancestral leaders were forced to the table to cede lands to the United States government in the form of treaties.

"We signed seven in all, and traded our lands for health care, education and housing. We negotiated in good faith, but the government never honored any treaty with any Tribe in Oregon."

Bobb recalled how Tribal mem-



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. speaks during the monthly meeting of the McMinnville chapter of the Band of Brothers Veterans held at Evergreen Aviation Museum on Thursday, July 1. Bobb spoke about the history of Native Americans, especially the experiences of the Grand Ronde Tribe, and why despite these experiences Native Americans still enlist in the military in larger percentages per capita than any other group.

bers were forced by federal troops to march almost 270 miles in the winter of 1856 from their temporary reservation at Table Rocks near Medford to the 60,000-acre Grand Ronde Reservation. The journey is referred to as the Oregon Trail of Tears.

"Joel Palmer was the Indian agent who was supposed to care for the Indians while he cheated them out of everything," Bobb said. "That was his job. But in time, Grand Ronde transitioned into a logging area and a positive place to live, where we still had our cultural practices and language. Then came the Western Oregon Termination Act of 1954. It terminated all trust responsibilities from the U.S. government to the Tribes west of the Cascades because that land had become valuable with old growth timber."

Bobb explained how after Termination, Tribal members scattered over the United States.

"But we were always Grand Ronde Indians, regardless of what the gov-

ernment told us we were going to be," he said. "But we suffered adversity and prejudice along the way."

Bobb then touched on the Tribe's Restoration in 1983, getting emotional as he did so.

"President Ronald Reagan signed the Grand Ronde Restoration Act, which re-recognized us as Grand Ronde people again. There was so much work our people did to get to that point. ... Now, we thank Creator every day for our blessings. Spirit Mountain Casino has done very well. We have services for health care, education and housing. Six percent of the revenues from the casino go back to people in the community."

Despite Native Americans' terrible past experiences with the United States government, they still continue to serve in the military and defend a nation that was once taken from them. Bobb explained why from his perspective.

"Creator put us here with the intent

to share the land, not for man to dominate and take what was not intended for them to have," Bobb said. "We will protect this beautiful nation that was intended for us. If we were called today, we wouldn't hesitate. The nation is still ours and we still want to share the wealth. We are all a family of God and we believe everything has a spirit and a purpose. ... You'll never see us out destroying other people's property but you will see us come out when the environment is about to be destroyed, even more than it has been already."

Bobb also discussed misconceptions about Native Americans that persist in today's society.

"Until recently, there was no teaching in schools about Native Americans (in the present) and how Tribal cultures are still alive today," he said. "They are working on that, though, so people will learn more about the First Peoples who lived here and continue to live here."

Bobb added that most knowledge of Tribal people is limited to what he called "The John Wayne Indian."

"The Indian was always the renegade, the savage, the bad person," he said. "That's what was depicted in most movies when it was really the other way around."

He added that Native Americans are also the only minority group with sports teams named after them, which often included demeaning names such as "Redskins." Bobb noted that some of that is beginning to change, along with the use of the word "squaw" for names ranging from creeks to geographical locations.

"For Native Americans, you got to be positive and move forward," Bobb said. "You're not going to be able to change what has already happened. Our world is in turmoil. We have to work together and stay together. Everyone in this nation is one family." ■

First phase will have 20 single-family homes

HOUSING continued from front page

It's been 23 years since Grand Meadows, located on Tribal property at McPherson and Grand Ronde roads, opened a 36-lot manufactured home subdivision to Tribal families. Housing Department officials say a second development is long overdue.

In 2020, Reece and Associates of Albany was selected to conduct a property development plan for the new site. The first phase will have 20 single-family homes on 10,000-square-foot lots.

The Tribe's current housing options typically have occupation rates of 94 percent or higher, and lack of available market-rate homes has been a sticking point in Tribal members moving to Grand Ronde and working in the community.

Leno and Housing Administrative Program Manager Joan Dugger said that new home ownership opportunities will help fill a void in the local housing market. The Tribe currently offers low-income housing, market-rate rental units



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Farm equipment sits on the Rink 2 property where Tribal members will eventually be able to purchase a lot to build a home. The property encompasses approximately 86.5 acres and is east of the Grand Meadows development.

and Elder housing. The home ownership piece will fill that void where a person can buy their own house and move out of a rental, which also creates room for other renters.

According to the 2020 Housing Department annual report, it operates 61 low-income Elder units, 100 rental housing low-income units and 36 market-rate units.

Before the Housing Department

began actively pursuing home ownership, a survey was sent out in June and July of 2019. Out of 222 Tribal members who answered the question regarding whether they were interested in buying land and building a home in Grand Ronde, 142 said yes. Of those, 69 indicated they would be interested in leasing land and building a home, and 71 said they are interested in buying a home and

have the financial resources to do so. Thirty people were re-interviewed over the phone.

The survey also found that the most popular new home option would be stick-built homes and the most popular lot size was between a half-acre to an acre.

The Housing Department used the survey results to determine a target population for the phase one

housing development and found there were 20 families that were ready to buy whenever housing became available, and that they were willing to go through the pre-qualification process to obtain a loan.

Dugger says all loans will have to be made through the Section 184 Indian Home Loan Program, which is a federal program specifically designed for American Indian and Alaska Native families, Alaska villages, Tribes or Tribally designated housing entities. Congress established the program in 1992 to increase homeownership and access in Native communities. With Section 184 financing, borrowers can get into a home with a low down payment and flexible underwriting.

A price point for homes has not been set. The Housing Department is hoping to have multiple plans to suit a variety of budgets.

For more information or to be added to the interested list of Tribal members, contact Leno at shonn.leno@grandronde.org or call him at 503-879-2397. ■