

Mejia convicted for starting Blue Heron fire

By Danielle Harrison

Smoke Signals staff writer

OREGON CITY – The man suspected of starting a fire that damaged the Grand Ronde Tribe’s Blue Heron property was found guilty of several felony and misdemeanor charges in Clackamas County Circuit Court on Thursday, March 10.

Enrique Omar Mejia, 30, was arrested by Oregon City police for the Dec. 5, 2020, fire at the former Blue Heron Paper Mill site that the Tribe purchased in August 2019. He was originally scheduled to go on trial in February 2021, but it was delayed multiple times.

Mejia was found guilty of first-degree arson, second-degree arson, second-degree burglary, second-degree disorderly conduct and second-degree criminal trespass. The first three are felony convictions.

He will be sentenced by Clackamas County Circuit Court Judge Kathie F. Steele on Monday, May 23.

According to Circuit Court docu-



Enrique Omar Mejia

ments, Mejia waived his right to a jury trial and instead opted for a bench trial.

The trial was delayed due to a

mental health evaluation for Mejia and judicial complications due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After undergoing a mental health evaluation, Mejia was found fit to proceed early in 2021 by Clackamas County Judge Heather Karabeika and had another trial date set for June 1, but that was rescheduled to November after new statements by a witness during a pretrial meeting. The trial was later postponed another time due to a lack of available judges during the pandemic.

Competency called into question

Mejia’s court-appointed attorney

Ruben Medina Jr. requested a psychiatric/psychological examination in late December 2020, saying that a criminal trial could violate his client’s “fundamental right to competency.”

Mejia reportedly made “concerning statements” that called into question his ability to stand trial, Medina said. He added that his client’s family members said that he had been having mental health issues for some time.

Medina told the court that Mejia claimed to have had a chip implanted in his head and wanted to know what would happen when the chip was discovered. He also asserted that he was followed around by a cult that was trying to frame him for a crime.

According to a Dec. 29 court filing reported by *The Clackamas Review*, Mejia said that because of his brain implant “a group of people can see what I’m thinking; they can see what I see, and they can hear what I hear. ... I’m not sure exactly what it is, but I think it’s part of a cell phone or Google eye or something.”

Mejia’s most recent criminal conviction was a 2018 disorderly-conduct charge in Lincoln City.

According to the *Lincoln City News Guard*, he also was cited and released by the Lincoln City Police Department in July 2020 after police received a report of a man with a beer pushing a crosswalk button over and over again.

Other criminal convictions include driving under the influence of intoxicants, reckless driving, criminal trespassing, harassment and interfering with a parole and probation officer.

Oregon law states that a person may be found incapacitated if, as a result of a qualifying mental disorder, he or she is “unable to understand the nature of the proceedings against the defendant or to assist and cooperate with the counsel.”

Mejia remained in the Clackamas County Jail in Oregon City on \$100,000 bail on one count of second-degree arson until June 3, 2021, when was he released on his own recognizance. He had been previously denied release because of failure to appear charges, the felony arson charge, having adult convictions and being unemployed. ■

Includes information from Pamplin Media Group and KGW.

Community Shred Event set for April 25

The next Community Shred Event, just in time for spring cleaning, will be held from noon to 1 p.m. Monday, April 25.

People are asked to remove paper clips and binder clips from the documents they want shredded. The drive-through event will be held at the Grand Ronde recycling depot on Tyee Road near Tribal housing. Tribal Elders needing a ride to the event should contact the Elders Activity Center at 503-879-2233. In addition, the Grand Ronde Food Bank is need of tuna, canned meat, soup, chili, cereal, crackers and baking items. The Shred Event will be collecting donations.

For more information, contact Kim Mueller at kim.mueller@grandronde.org. ■

Tribes seeking Joint Committee on Gambling

SALEM – Five Native American Tribes in Oregon, including the Grand Ronde Tribe, are asking that the state of Oregon convene a special Joint Committee on Gambling.

Joining the Grand Ronde Tribe in the request are the Cow Creek, Klamath, Umatilla and Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw.

The request was made in a March 11 letter from the five Tribes sent to Senate President Peter Courtney and new House Speaker Dan Rayfield.

“We are writing to request a meeting with you in the spirit of our government-to-government relationship regarding our continued request for the state of Oregon to convene a special Joint Committee on Gambling,” the letter stated. “It has been more than 25 years since the state has led a comprehensive review of the state-gambling regulatory structure. Another examination is long overdue and necessary given the evolution of technology in gambling and the constant pressures to expand state government-sponsored and private gambling in Oregon.”

Lisa Taylor, Courtney’s chief of staff, said he is ready to talk and is setting up a meeting with Tribal representatives.

Rayfield spokesman Danny Moran said the new speaker wants to make progress on the issue.

“Speaker Rayfield committed to establish a joint committee on gambling weeks ago, and his office has been in contact with Tribal members to plan next steps,” Moran said. “He shares concerns about the expansion of gambling options in the state and the impact it will have on the Tribes.”

Recently, a proposal to install 225 slot machine-like historic racing machines at a horse racing track in Grants Pass was scuttled after the Oregon Department of Justice advised that the proposal violated the state Constitution. In addition, a bill submitted by Courtney to allow betting on Oregon college sporting events did not even receive a floor vote during the Oregon Legislature’s recent short session.

In addition, a Tribally supported bill that would have halted all expansion of gaming in Oregon until state, Tribal and private interests could sit down and discuss the future of gaming in the state also failed. ■

Includes information from Willamette Week.