

Community Fund tops \$94 million in giving

Tillamook-based Food Roots says grants mean ‘everything’ to organization’s mission

By Danielle Harrison

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Spirit Mountain Community Fund awarded almost \$653,000 in grants on Wednesday, June 14, during its first in-person check presentation in more than three years.

The last in-person presentation was held shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all in-person events on the Tribal campus in March 2020.

The Community Fund receives 6 percent of proceeds from Spirit Mountain Casino and awards grants to nonprofits in 11 north-west Oregon counties to fund efforts in the areas of arts and culture, environmental preservation, education, health, historic preservation and public safety, and to the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon under its Tribal Grants program.

As of the second quarter of 2023, the Grand Ronde Tribe’s philanthropic giving now surpasses \$94 million.

The Community Fund was created as part of the Tribe’s gaming compact with the state of Oregon. It is supervised by an eight-member Board of Trustees that includes Tribal Council members Denise Harvey, Brenda Tuomi and Michael Cherry, who is also a former Community Fund director.

Tillamook-based Food Roots is one of the Community Fund’s beneficiaries, having received grants at least three times before its \$45,000 award on Wednesday for its food equity efforts.

“It means everything to us to receive these grants,” Food Roots Executive Director Lauren Sorg said. “For Food Roots, the capacity the grant funds us at allows us to hire strong workers and be out there in the community and really administer these programs that truly have an impact.”

The grant will be used to address three common barriers to accessing fresh food for the local food insecure community. Specifically, it



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Lindsay Ward, Food Roots marketplace operations manager, takes inventory of salad mix after it was delivered to the Tillamook office on Monday, May 22. The salad mix was grown at Fawcett Creek Farm, one of the organization’s 50 producers that provides food to them. Food Roots received a \$45,000 grant from Spirit Mountain Community Fund during its quarterly check presentation on Wednesday, June 14.

will increase affordability, address transportation barriers in accessing food and increase the community’s understanding of local food opportunities.

Food Roots was founded in 2006 by community members, led by Tillamook resident Shelly Bowe, who worked for nine years to bring the project to fruition.

Bowe and her supporters built a team of people, projects and resources to help Food Roots create a network among food producers, educators, agencies, nonprofits, farmer’s markets, schools, youth groups and local governments.

Sorg began working for the organization in 2010 as an AmeriCorps volunteer and was named executive director in 2015.

“Our mission is to grow a robust and equitable food system,” she said. “That means farm and food business support, better food access and equity, and increasing knowledge and visibility in the community. We strongly believe that everyone, no matter what their income, has the right to be able to choose the best food for their

family.”

Food Roots partners with 50 local food producers within a 100-mile radius to serve 300 customers annually. The organization also has four corporate clients: Adventist Health, Tillamook Creamery, Nestucca Valley School District and the Oregon Food Bank.

“The most coveted items (by food bank clients) are meats and dairy products,” Food Roots Executive Assistant Britt McIntosh said. “These are things they typically don’t have access to at a food pantry. When we can provide local, nutritious food, it benefits the whole community.”

To encourage participation by families who receive food assistance benefits or those who self-identify as needing assistance, Food Roots offers a matching program for up to \$20 and free delivery services.

“We want to support our local producers and also make healthy, locally grown food accessible to everyone in the county,” McIntosh said.

In addition to locally-grown fruit and vegetables, the organization also offers milk, cheeses, meat, seafood, olive oil, salsa, spices, sauces, jams and more.

“Education is a big piece of our mission,” McIntosh said. “We want to educate folks that what they are buying is the actual cost for the producers to make it. We don’t put

a huge markup on items.”

McIntosh said she is grateful to the Community Fund for the trust it had placed in Food Roots by awarding grants.

“They value our work and that is the intangible piece in all of this,” she said. “It adds health and resiliency to our community members, and people are getting local food, too. That has a compounding effect.”

Check presentation

Community Fund Director Angie Sears welcomed attendees to the event, which opened with a welcome prayer and drum song from Tribal Council member Jon A. George.

Tribal Council member and former Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George discussed the Tribe’s culture of potlatch and how it relates to the Community Fund.

“It is so wonderful to see our friends and partners here on our Grand Ronde homelands,” George said. “... It is often recognized in Tribal culture that we place a tremendous cultural importance on giving and it’s true, we do. We call it a culture of potlatch.”

“I think what Tribes have always recognized and what’s at the heart of living potlatch is to recognize our mutual responsibility to each other. That is to say, if there are things that I have that can be a help to you and empower your work, then it’s my obligation to do what I can to help with that. ... I think it is this spirit, our mutual obligation to one another, that is at the heart of Spirit Mountain Community Fund and why the Grand Ronde Tribe created Spirit Mountain Community Fund.”

“I also think it is just the right thing to do and that is exemplified by all the people in this room. ... The people in this room don’t cop-out.”

Sears introduced Community Fund employees: Program Coordinator Angela Schlappie, Administrative Assistant Trudy Sylvia and Grants Coordinator Jesse Knight. She also introduced the Community Fund’s three Summer Youth Interns: Laney DeLoe, Ben Powley and Taytum West.

The approximately 50 people who attended watched a video on the history of the Tribe, and then Knight and Schlappie announced the grant recipients after representatives from the Luckiamute Valley Charter Schools and ARC of Lane County discussed their funded projects.

For the Luckiamute Valley Charters Schools, the Community Fund grant will help fund installation of a new greenhouse and help create a space where students can learn to love nature, said Gardening and Outdoor Education Program Coordinator Lua Siegel. The schools serves more than 200 K-8 students in rural Polk County.

ARC of Lane County will use its grant to continue building an accessible two-story park for people



Phil Blake, president of American Military Encouragement Network, talks with Tribal Council member Michael Cherry during Spirit Mountain Community Fund’s quarterly check presentation held in the Governance Center Atrium on Wednesday, June 14. The nonprofit received a \$50,000 grant and won a Tribal Pendleton blanket in a raffle drawing. It was the first in-person check presentation since March 2020.

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