

Tribal Police officers honored for lifesaving efforts

By Sherron Lumley

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Oregon Peace Officers Association honored the lifesaving efforts of Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department officers Angel Arenas and Austin Gomez at its annual statewide awards banquet at Spirit Mountain Casino on Friday, Nov. 17.

The awards are given to law enforcement personnel and citizens throughout Oregon for exemplary deeds and service in their communities.

Both men used CPR in separate emergency situations this year, each saving a life. Gomez received a Lifesaving Award and Arenas was presented with a Lifesaving Award with Valor.

"I'm really proud of their bravery, composure and training to give lifesaving actions," Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight said. "These were proactive patrolling calls that show how important it is that the Tribe has its own police department."

At 1:28 p.m. Thursday, March 9, Gomez responded within one minute to an emergency dispatch call to the intersection of Fire Hall and Andy Riggs roads in Grand Ronde.

"I arrived on scene and observed a white Mazda CX-9 parked on the side of the road with its hazard lights on," he said. "Hanging out the driver's door was a male unconscious, not breathing, and his skin was a bluish gray."

When the man did not respond and based on the original call details, Gomez administered Naloxone, an overdose reversal medicine, into



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department Officer Austin Gomez is awarded the Life Saving Award during the Oregon Peace Officers Association Law Enforcement Awards Banquet at Spirit Mountain Casino's Event Center on Friday, Nov. 17.

each nostril. He then performed seven minutes of CPR

"The male would breathe on his own for a moment then would become unresponsive again," Gomez said.

He continued CPR until medics arrived.

The incident Arenas responded to occurred during a routine patrol at 4 p.m. Wednesday, May 24.

"I was driving through the Tribal main campus



Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department Officer Angel Arenas, middle, is awarded the Life Saving Award with Valor during the Oregon Peace Officers Association Law Enforcement Awards Banquet. At left is OPOA Board of Directors past President Robert Wirt and OPOA Board of Directors incoming President Darren Pomeroy is on the right.

and saw a mother holding her child in distress yelling for help," he said. "I quickly exited my police vehicle and saw the child was having a severe medical issue and was not responsive at the time. I called for medical personnel to respond to my location. While medics were in route, I started providing medical aid to the child to include CPR, and was able to get the child conscious and alert by the time medical personnel arrived on scene."

Tribal Police provide service 24 hours a day, seven days a week to the Grand Ronde community, and respond to local calls through a mutual aid agreement with Yamhill County. ■

Willamina opens discussions with Tribe for law enforcement contract

By Sherron Lumley

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Willamina City Council voted unanimously to begin discussions with the Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department regarding the city's law enforcement contract in a public meeting held on Tuesday, Nov. 14.

Currently, through a mutual aid agreement, Tribal Police and Yamhill County coordinate coverage for the city of Willamina, although this is not a monetary agreement.

The Yamhill County Sheriff's Office, which has provided law

enforcement under contract to Willamina for 30 years, and city councilors expressed appreciation and admiration for the Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department.

"The Sheriff's Department and Tribal Police just blend and it has been a relief," Patrol Capt. Sam Elliot said. "We have been so completely impressed. They do a tremendous job."

The Tribal Police Department, with approval from Tribal Council, approached Willamina city staff about the law enforcement contract,

which runs annually from July 1 to June 30.

"We do work well together," Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight said. "At this point, we are just going to have some talks."

Oregon law allow cities to contract with county sheriffs and governing bodies for police services to incorporated cities.

In fiscal year 2023-24, Willamina Mayor Ila Skyberg and outgoing Yamhill County Sheriff Tim Svenson signed the annual \$358,553 agreement for police services, paid in monthly installments of \$29,879. This covers personnel expenses, such as salaries, health and life insurance for two deputies, overtime, vehicle costs and uniforms. This is an increase from \$299,655 in 2021 and \$338,454 in 2022.

Willamina City Manager and Budget Officer Bridget Meneley addressed an underlying issue in her written summary: "Police departments, nationwide, have experienced a staffing shortage. Yamhill County Sheriff's Office is included in that shortage and is not able to maintain an adequate minimum staffing level and effectively conduct policing for the entire county."

Grand Ronde could provide three full-time officers, a supervisor and adequate minimum staffing levels within Willamina's current law enforcement budget, McKnight said. There also would be an increase in

community engagement opportunities working collaboratively with Willamina city staff.

"We are asking for a decision in the next couple of months, by mid-January or so, to have time to hire on and train," McKnight said.

Willamina pays for the law enforcement contract through a combination of general fund monies and a public safety fee. The city's total budget for fiscal year 2023-24 is \$10,039,724.

In addition to infrastructure improvements, Willamina anticipates economic development, planning and land use development, increasing the number of homes and franchise fees, according to the fiscal year 2023-24 budget message.

As Willamina prepares for growth, its leaders "aim to provide the most complete service to our community," which includes adequate law enforcement.

The Tribe has greatly expanded the emergency services it provides to the West Valley area since building a fire station in Grand Ronde in 2010.

In 2020, the Tribe and the West Valley Fire District worked out a transition plan for the Tribe to assume control and operations in Grand Ronde. In 2022, Tribal Council approved a five-year agreement to operate the Willamina Fire Station from Jan. 1, 2023, through Dec. 31, 2027. ■

12/1/23
5:00PM-7:30PM

GREAT CIRCLE RECOVERY

-Location-
Tribal Gymnasium
9615 Grand Ronde Rd,
Grand Ronde, OR 97347

Missing & Murdered Indigenous People
AWARENESS DINNER

- Traditional Meal
- Speakers
- Education
- Awareness
- Raffle

#MMIP

Tribal nonemergency text line

The Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department has a nonemergency text line at 541-921-2927.

"If you have a nonemergency situation or question, feel free to contact my officer via text through this line," said Grand Ronde Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight. "When one of my officers receives the text, they will call you back when they have time."

McKnight said that emergency situations still require calling 911. For more information, contact McKnight at 503-879-1474. ■