

Community Fund tops \$96 million mark in giving

Acres of Hope says grant awards are crucial to its mission of helping youth

By Danielle Harrison

Smoke Signals editor

Spirit Mountain Community Fund awarded more than \$800,000 in grants on Wednesday, Dec. 13, during a check presentation held in the Governance Center Atrium.

The Community Fund receives 6 percent of proceeds from Spirit Mountain Casino and awards that money 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 the fund's Tribal Grants program.

As of the fourth quarter of 2023, the Grand Ronde Tribe's philanthropic giving now exceeds \$96 million with 3,291 grants awarded since 1997.

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.

Tribal Council members who attended the check presentation included Jon A. George, Secretary Michael Cherry, Tuomi and Harvey. Tuomi also serves as the Community Fund Board of Trustees chair and Harvey is the secretary.

Acres of Hope

Independence-based Acres of Hope is one of the Community Fund's beneficiaries, receiving a \$50,000 grant on Wednesday for its work helping youth throughout the Willamette Valley who have experienced trauma create healthy connections through exposure to nature, art, mentorship and horses.

Acres of Hope sits on 40-acres and includes a large, airy covered riding arena with converted offices. It was founded as a nonprofit in July 2020 by husband-and-wife team Justin and Emmy Arana, who are lifelong Oregon residents.

They bought the property in late 2019, right before the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered nearly everything for months, except outdoor venues.

"We had big plans and we were taking a huge step of faith," Justin said. "Nothing made sense at the time."

The nonprofit youth ranch is a long-held dream of Emmy, a former Salem-Keizer School District teacher, who found healing through horses, friendship and mentorship after her father was incarcerated during her teenage years.

The Aranas began the program with 20 youth, three horses and three mentors. Now, the nonprofit serves 90 youth and has 100 more on the waiting list, with 10 horses and nine staff members to serve them.

The program's mission is to share HOPE (Healing, Opportunity, Purpose, Education) with adolescents



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Roxann O'Bryant, left, a session leader at Acres of Hope Youth Ranch in Independence, helps Stephanie Smith, 14, with the reins during a session at the ranch on Monday, Dec. 4. The nonprofit youth ranch has a mission to share HOPE (Healing, Opportunity, Purpose, Education) with adolescents that are feeling HURT (Harmed, Unseen, Rejected, Traumatized) through equine-based, one-on-one and small group mentoring. They received a \$50,000 grant from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund during the Fund's fourth quarter check presentation held in the Governance Center Atrium on Wednesday, Dec. 13.

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"The community has supported us and sees the need," Justin said. "We had no issue finding youth who need some extra help. ... We teach them full horsemanship at no cost and the only requirement is that they want to be here."

The program focuses on self-esteem, responsibility, self-control, healthy relationships, emotional awareness and independence. Additionally, there is an onsite parent support mentor.

The \$50,000 grant from the Community Fund will go toward costs of operating the program, specifically for funding mentors to work with youth.

"It really will help us to fund our staff and serve youth," Justin said, adding that the organization had recently received another grant for equipment. "These grants are a big blessing. ... We always have a growth mindset but everything depends on what God wants for us. Simply having a place for kids to go is likely helping to save their lives."

Check presentation

Community Fund Director Angie Sears welcomed the approximately 40 attendees to the event.

"The presentations are an opportunity to connect, recognize and celebrate the work you do in your communities," she said.

The check presentation opened with a prayer and drum song by Jon A. George.

Tuomi said that the Community Fund continues the Native tradition of potlatch.

"I've had the pleasure of serving on the board for a year and what a blessing it has been," Tuomi said. "I am honored to have you here. Giving is in our DNA and we could not do it without you."

Sears introduced Community Fund employees: Program Coordinator Angela Schlappie, Administrative Assistant Pamala

Warren-Chase and Grants Coordinator Jesse Knight.

The attendees then watched a video on the history of the Tribe. After the video, representatives from Acres of Hope and Project Lemonade gave brief descriptions about what their organizations seek to do in the community.

After the two presentations, Knight and Schlappie announced the grant recipients.

During the check distribution portion, the Community Fund awarded 11 small grants worth \$75,120 and 21 large grants worth \$768,311.

Small grant recipients were:

- Artists Repertory Theatre of Portland, \$7,500, for a boarding school play by Blossom Johnson (Diné);
- Black Parent Initiative of Portland, \$7,500, for a Sacred Roots Doula and mobile lactation services;
- Bridgeworks Oregon, \$7,500, for PonyXpress chapbooks and broadsides;
- Diamonds in the Rough Ministry of Newport, \$7,500, for its Diamond Outreach transportation;
- Operation Warm Inc., \$7,500, for its Warm Up Yamhill and Tillamook Counties initiative;
- Portland Workforce Alliance, \$7,000, for its mentoring program;
- Project Lemonade of Portland, \$7,500, for The INSPIRE Network;
- Recovery Unbroken of Clackamas County, \$3,120;
- Rose Haven of Portland, \$7,500, for BLOOM Wellness and Empowerment;
- Sauvie Island Center, \$7,500, for building equity in the natural world;
- Tinkerverse of Multnomah County, \$5,000, for its weekend Tinker Camp program.

Large grant recipients were:

- Acres of Hope of Independence;

\$50,000, for mentoring services for youth who have experienced trauma;

- Bradley Angie of Multnomah County, \$25,000, for economic empowerment for survivors;
- Caldera Arts of Portland, \$20,000, for its arts apprenticeship program for underserved youth;
- CASA of Lane County, \$50,000, for its Deepening Our Roots program;
- Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence of Corvallis, \$50,000, for funding support for overnight shelter advocates;
- Corvallis Neighborhood Housing Services Inc., \$50,000, for building financial skills and growing savings for Tribal members in Oregon;
- Elevate Oregon of Portland, \$50,000, for its culturally responsive mentoring program;
- NAMI-Clackamas, \$19,652, for suicide and

crisis intervention in rural Clackamas County;

- Open Hearts Open Minds of Gresham, \$16,000, for Up a Creek Theatre;
- Oregon Coast Aquarium of Newport, \$100,000, to build a marine wildlife rehabilitation center;
- Play it Forward of Portland, \$30,000, for equal access to music MAGIC at King Elementary School;
- Prevent Child Abuse Oregon, \$42,300, for trauma-informed support for providers serving children and families;
- Sexual Assault Support Services of Eugene, \$44,684, for its Reaching Further text/chat program line and Spanish language direct;
- Smart Living, Learning & Earning with Autism, \$38,580, for its integrated health program;
- Soaring Heights Recovery Homes of Keizer, \$24,380, its Making a Home building projects for The Oriole House for Women;
- SquareOne Villages of Eugene, \$30,000, for relocation and improvement of the Opportunity Village transitional shelter;
- Tides of Change of Tillamook County, \$10,000, for ADA accessibility for a confidential shelter;
- Together We Are Greater Than of Portland, \$27,715, for its math equity program;
- Wellmama Inc. of Eugene, \$22,000, for post-natal support services;
- William Temple House of Portland, \$50,000, for culturally relevant mental health counseling;
- Yamhill County CASA, \$18,000, for its One Hundred Percent project.

Two beaded necklaces were raffled off to the Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Support Services. An Ikanum saddle blanket designed by Tribal member Travis Stewart went to Bridgeworks Oregon. ■