

# Community Fund tops \$97 million mark in giving

By Danielle Harrison

Smoke Signals editor

Spirit Mountain Community Fund awarded more than \$500,000 in grants on Tuesday, March 12, 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 northwest 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 first quarter of 2024, the Grand Ronde Tribe's philanthropic giving now exceeds \$97 million with 3,309 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 Tuomi, Jon A. George and Cherry.

Tuomi welcomed the approximately 30 attendees to the event.

"It's an honor to welcome you to our homelands," she said. "We celebrate your generosity, compassion and the impact it has in our local communities. It serves as a testament to the shared belief that by working together we can make a difference."

Community Fund Executive Director Angie Sears thanked those in attendance for making the drive out to Grand Ronde.

"This check presentation is a way to recognize and celebrate the amazing work you are doing in your communities," she said.

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

Sears introduced Community Fund employees: Program Coordinator Angela Schlappie, Administrative Assistant Pamala Warren-Chase and Grants Coordi-



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

**Delia Sanchez, an organizer with Water Climate Trust, hugs Tribal Council member and Spirit Mountain Community Fund Board of Trustees Chair Brenda Tuomi as she accepts a grant check on behalf of the nonprofit during the Community Fund's quarterly check presentation in the Governance Center Atrium on Tuesday, March 12. Sanchez is a Grand Ronde Tribal member.**

nator Jesse Knight.

The attendees then watched a video on the history of the Tribe. After the video, representatives from Forward Stride of Beaverton and Salem Dream Center gave brief descriptions about what their organizations seek to do in the community.

Forward Stride Executive Director Amber Varner said that the nonprofit utilizes equine-based therapy to serve more than 200 clients, including those from the Native American Rehabilitation Association.

"It is a unique opportunity to utilize horses to assist with educational goals young people are working toward," she said. "The bond between the horse and the rider carries through and can be worked on away from the barn."

Salem Dream Center Executive Director Craig Oviatt said that his organization exists to help young people realize their value, to break the cycle of generational poverty and into lives of sufficiency.

The center provides tutoring, mentoring, study groups, art and cooking classes, summer camps, holiday programs, game and movie nights, field trips, free meals and more.

"We realized one of the greatest detriments in poverty is the lack of hope," Oviatt said.

When the nonprofit was launched in 2004 in West Salem's Edgewater District, only 61 percent of students in the area graduated from high school. None of them went to college.

Oviatt and his team set out to change those statistics and focused on building relationships within the community.

"It's only through relationships that you can mend broken hearts and lives," he said. "We were able to support kids during the pandemic when many were struggling with isolation and 100% of the teens in our program graduated high school."

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

During the check distribution portion, the Community Fund awarded 6 small grants worth \$41,000 and 12 large grants worth \$490,847.

**Small grant recipients were:**

- Assistance League of Portland, \$7,500, for its Operation School Bell program;
- Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics and Ecology of Eugene, \$7,500 for its Oregon Indigenous Fire Advocacy Project;
- Forward Stride of Beaverton, \$5,000, for supporting health and wellbeing for youth in underserved communities;
- McMinnville Area Habitat for Humanity, \$7,500, for its 2023 Women Build townhouse;
- Oregon Health and Education Collaborative of Wilsonville, \$7,500, for its Upstream Initia-

tive program;

- Union Gospel Mission of Salem, \$6,000, for restorative services for domestic violence survivors.

**Large grant recipients were:**

- Boys and Girls Club of Corvallis, \$20,000, for its Building Pathways out of Poverty program;
- Human Access Project of Portland, \$49,847, for a Ross Island Lagoon harmful algae bloom mitigation cost analysis;
- LatinoBuilt of Portland, \$50,000, for construction education and technical assistance;
- Liberty House of Salem, \$50,000, for access to frontline pediatric care and interviewing services;
- Long Tom Watershed Council of Eugene, \$50,000, for traditional ecocultural education for Native youth and families;
- Native Fish Society of Oregon City, \$25,000, for its Wild Fish Community program;
- Northwest Housing Alternatives of Milwaukie, \$50,000, for education supports for low-income children in Oregon,
- Portland State University Foundation, \$50,000, for a student camp at PSU for Native students,
- Salem Dream Center, \$50,000, for its Build the Dream program;
- University of Oregon Foundation of Eugene, \$41,000, for its Roots of Empathy program;
- Water Climate Trust of Klamath Falls, \$35,000, for its Oregon Water Justice Alliance program;
- Wayside Friends Church of Newberg, \$20,000, for Camp Wayside 2024.

Three beaded necklaces were raffled off after the grant recipients were announced. An Ikanum saddle blanket designed by Tribal member Travis Stewart went to Liberty House.

Cherry closed the event by thanking all of the nonprofits for their work.

"As a member of this board, it is an honor and privilege to extend our congratulations and gratitude to you," she said. ■

## Community Fund seeking Hatfield Fellow applicants

Applications for the 2024-25 Hatfield Fellowship program funded by Spirit Mountain Community Fund are being accepted through Tuesday, April 30.

Spirit Mountain Community Fund annually sponsors a Native American to serve as the Hatfield Fellow and intern in an Oregon congressional office. Placement of the fellow rotates through the Oregon delegation to enhance mutual understanding between leadership in Washington, D.C., and Indian Country.

Fellows are provided an opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding of how to navigate the political process in Washington, D.C., while working on issues that affect Native Americans.

Fellows begin their Capitol Hill experience in November with a month-long orientation at the American Political Science Association, which is followed by an eight-month term working in a congressional office. The fellowship includes a monthly stipend and relocation and travel expenses.

The fellowship is for Tribal members from the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon, as well as members of Pacific Northwest Tribes. Preference will be given to members of Oregon Tribes. Applicants must have a bachelor's degree or be graduating in June 2024, and be 21 or older.

For more information, visit [thecommunityfund.com/grants-programs/hatfield-fellowship](http://thecommunityfund.com/grants-programs/hatfield-fellowship) or go to [youtu.be/7TOnNoFgUYs](https://youtu.be/7TOnNoFgUYs) to watch an informational video about the Hatfield Fellowship.

The fellowship was created in 1998 to honor the late Sen. Mark Hatfield's public service to Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. ■



**Peter Carrillo, a grant specialist with Liberty House, is gifted an Ikanum saddle blanket by Spirit Mountain Community Fund Program Coordinator Angela Schlappie, left, and Community Fund Executive Director Angie Sears, right, during the Community Fund's quarterly check presentation in the Governance Center Atrium on Tuesday, March 12.**