

‘History was made today’

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

Getting the keys to your first home is typically a memorable event, but it was even more so for Tribal members Bryanna Rue and Jordyn McKnight, when they and their spouses became the first homeowners in the Tribe’s new development, Tipsu-ili’i on Thursday, May 9.

A ribbon cutting was held to mark the occasion, attended by Tribal Housing Department staff, General Manager Angie Blackwell, Tribal Council staff and council members Kathleen George, Jon A. George, Brenda Tuomi, Denise Harvey, Secretary Michael Cherry and Vice Chair Chris Mercier.

Kathleen George offered an invocation, and Mercier and Tuomi cut the ribbon.

“History was made today,” Tribal General Manager Angie Blackwell said.

Three years ago, the development at McPherson Road was just another field on the Grand Ronde Reservation. Despite some unexpected setbacks, the 20 homes have now been complete and are quickly garnering interested buyers. As of June 1, 16 of the homes are under contract, seven have closed and two of the remaining four have applicants. The price range for the majority of the homes is \$275,000 to \$310,000.

There are two larger homes priced higher than that range at \$350,000 and \$370,000.

Bryanna and her husband, Zach, began searching for their own home two years ago. Like many young buyers, they found it challenging to find something within their budget that was a good fit. The Tribe does help first-time homebuyers with a down payment assistance grant of up to \$20,000, but given rising home costs and interest rates, homeowner-



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal member Jordyn McKnight, holding his 1-year-old daughter Romie, and his wife Rebecca McKnight receive the key to their home, located in the Tribe’s homeownership project Tipsu-ili’i, from Tribal Housing Department Homeownership Coordinator Michele Plummer, right, on Thursday, May 9.



Tribal member Bryanna Rue and her husband Zach Rue receive the key to their home, located in the Tribe’s homeownership project Tipsu-ili’i, from Tribal Housing Department Homeownership Coordinator Michele Plummer.

if you’ve never bought a house before, a lot of the lingo was hard to understand.”

“We’ve had good guidance the whole time,” Zach said.

Both Bryanna and Zach are looking forward to living closer to the community and to work.

“We both work out here and I’m excited to be able to customize this home,” Zach said. “Grand Ronde is a beautiful place to be in.”

Added Bryanna, “I’m so excited to decorate the house.”

Their advice for other young Tribal members who want to buy a home is not to give up.

“Stick with the process and ask for help from the Housing Department or people you know who can give you good advice,” Bryanna said. “We’re really thankful for this opportunity and excited to be here.”

McKnight and his wife, Rebecca, are thrilled to be in their first home after nearly five years of sometimes frustrating searching.

“I feel like I can breathe again,” she said.

“A lot of hard work and dedication has paid off and it’s really nice,” Jordyn said. “Just seeing the kiddos play and enjoying themselves is so nice to see.”

The couple and their two daughters, Sutton, 2, and Romie, 1, are excited to make the new three-bedroom home their own.

“I would definitely say the lenien-

cy in doing what you want with the place and making it your own rather than renting is what I’m most looking forward to doing,” Jordyn said. “Having the kids being raised here in the community is a plus.”

“Having more room for the girls is a huge plus and also being able to make things feel more like us, in our own space and we’re able to give our girls security in the future and possibly their kids,” Rebecca said.

Later that day, after seeing the two families explore their new homes, Blackwell sent out an email thanking everyone who helped in the process.

“What a beautiful morning to hold the ribbon cutting and blessing for Tipsu-ili’i,” she said. “I know it was a long time in the making. Lands, Legal, Housing and Engineering and Planning collaborated closely to bring this project to fruition. I want to especially thank Michele (Plummer) in Housing for coordinating our internal departments, title company and lenders to facilitate the sale of the homes. This was uncharted territory but you all took on the challenge and brought a decades old dream true at last.”

Tribal Engineering & Community Development Department Manager Ryan Webb has been involved in the process since the beginning three years ago, when the new homes were little more than an empty field.

“It is a struggle to put into words the significance of handing over keys to the first couple of Tribal members,” he said. “I stood in that field three years ago and there was nothing, it was just another agricultural field in a rural community. I stood there during the ribbon cutting ceremony and looked at all the beautiful homes and I know I had a significant part in that transformation. I always knew when I entered into the engineering field that I wanted to be a public servant and help shape communities and neighborhoods, and in my career I have managed a lot of projects to help create livable communities, but none of them come close to the impact this development will have on the Grand Ronde community...I am truly grateful to the Tribe for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this project and create a great neighborhood for generations to come.”

It’s been 26 years since Grand Meadows, located on Tribal property at McPherson and Grand Ronde roads, opened a 36-lot manufactured home subdivision to Tribal families. Housing Department officials have repeatedly said a second development is long overdue.

In 2020, Reece and Associates of Albany was selected to conduct a property development plan for the new site. The first phase includes 20 single-family homes on 10,000-square-foot lots.

The Tribe’s current housing options typically have occupation rates of 94 percent or higher, and lack of available market-rate homes has been a sticking point in Tribal members moving to Grand Ronde and working in the community. ■

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Map created by Samuel Briggs III