

Reading Volunteers Needed at Grand Ronde Head Start

Children’s literacy nonprofit SMART Reading is seeking volunteers to read with students weekly at Grand Ronde Head Start. Reading is an essential skill for kids, helping them start and stay on a path to success in school and beyond, according to a press release from the organization.

“Volunteering with SMART Reading is a fun, meaningful way to impact kids right here in our community,” Michael Finlay, Interim Program Manager for SMART’s northwest area, said. “I regularly have volunteers tell me that the hour they spend at SMART is the best part of their week.”

The time commitment is one hour per week. To learn more, contact 971-634-1628 or visit www.SMARTReading.org. ■

New transit company will provide bus service

BUS ROUTE continued from front page

and 8:28 p.m.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, buses ran regularly between Grand Ronde, Lincoln City and Salem. Having the Coastal Connection and the Grand Ronde Express meant Tribal members living on the reservation didn’t need a car to attend to business they had elsewhere.

But the pandemic took a toll in many unexpected areas, including transit companies, which lost many of their drivers.

Last December, the Tillamook County Transportation District notified the Tribe it could no longer maintain the Coastal Connection Line that ran three times a day between Lincoln City and Salem. The last bus ran on Dec. 10 and since then, residents on the reservation have been without service to the coast or Salem.

Tillamook had already shuttered the Grand Ronde Express that ran between Grand Ronde and Salem, and the loss of the Coastal Connection left only Yamhill County Transit, which provides rides to Sheridan, Willamina and McMinnville Monday through Friday, eight times a day, with a stop at Spirit Mountain Casino.

Saturday service has been suspended until further notice. The Yamhill County Transit bus stops at two locations in McMinnville; Albertsons grocery store and the downtown transit center on Second Street.

It is possible to catch a bus to West Salem from the McMinnville Transit Center, five times a day, although several of those runs depart shortly before the bus from Grand Ronde reaches the Transit Center, and returning in time to catch the bus back to Grand Ronde is equally difficult.

Without the direct bus to Lincoln and Salem, “People aren’t able to visit their families, get their shopping done, go to the DMV or the courts,” Public Works Coordinator John Mercier said.

Since December, Mercier’s phone has been ringing, a lot. He said the inquiries are polite, but “I do get people saying ‘gosh, this is taking a long time.’”

Mercier said he understands the loss has been frustrating for many

people and he has been scrambling for months to find a new transit provider. Last January, he had hoped a few promising leads on possible new routes would come to fruition, but none of them panned out.

“Salem expressed an interest temporarily but they’ve become non-responsive,” Mercier said.

A new company has stepped forward: Pacific Crest Bus Lines. Since putting together a formal request for proposals, taking bids and evaluating them is a months-long process, Mercier said he received permission from the state Department of Transportation to hire the company for six months to fill in bus services while the Tribe goes through the formal process.

The company promised that it already had drivers and buses in place, Mercier said, and he was working on an agreement to store the buses at Chinook Winds Casino, which would also benefit from the new route.

Once that’s done, however, Mercier said he hopes ODOT will allow him to extend the contract to the end of next June, so that whichever company is awarded the contract for the permanent route can start at the beginning of the new biennium.

In addition to restoring travel between Salem and the coast, he is trying to get service into Dallas where the county courthouse and other offices are located, to add more convenient services for Tribal members.

Doing so, however, has proven problematic.

“None of the transit agencies will use the Kings Valley intersection,” Mercier said. “They’re waiting for ODOT to put a roundabout in. It’s already been delayed a year.”

Due to issues with utility companies, he said, 2026 is the earliest construction might begin.

Mercier is serving on the design committee for that roundabout. Once it is installed, he doesn’t expect to have any trouble finding a company to establish a route to Dallas.

In addition, he said, Pacific Crest is working on a route with another organization for a bus route between Eugene and Forest Grove, with a stop in Grand Ronde, although Mercier said the starting date isn’t going to be soon. ■

Tribe hosting annual Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam Oct. 2-4

The Tribe will host the annual Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday to Friday, Oct. 2-4, at Chachalu Tribal Museum & Cultural Center. The museum is located at 8720 Grand Ronde Road. To register, visit eventbrite.com/e/gathering-of-grand-ronde-tilixam-oct-2-4th-tickets-1003137620627. This community gathering will include discussions about historical and intergenerational trauma, wisdom, culture, identity and healing. Breakfast, snacks and lunch will be served daily.

For more information, call 503-879-2034. ■

Kennedy is featured speaker at Les AuCoin Hall dedication



The celebration of Pacific University’s 175th anniversary began Friday, Sept. 27, with Grand Ronde Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy serving as a featured speaker during the dedication of the new Les AuCoin Hall.

A 1969 alumnus of Pacific, AuCoin enrolled at Pacific in 1960 and attended for one year before enlisting in the Army. After completing his service, AuCoin returned to Pacific where he served as the university’s public information officer while simultaneously completing his undergraduate degree in journalism.

Upon entering politics, AuCoin served two terms in the Oregon House of Representatives, including one term as majority leader, before serving nine terms in Congress representing Oregon’s first congressional district.

AuCoin, along with former Oregon Sen. Mark O. Hatfield, introduced the legislation that would restore the Grand Ronde Tribe to federal recognition in 1983, ending 29 years of Termination.

Five years later, AuCoin and Hatfield would once again team up to ensure that the federal government’s promise of new reservation land would be kept.

In addition to Kennedy, other keynote speakers included former Oregon Gov. Barbara Roberts and former Southern Oregon University president and Chancellor of the University System of New Hampshire Stephen Reno.

The ceremony began with a drum song performed by Grand Ronde drummers and singers, recognizing AuCoin’s role in helping the Tribe regain its official status.

During the reception, attendees had the opportunity to interact with student groups that promote civic engagement, diversity and multiculturalism. They were also able to view a storytelling display chronicling AuCoin’s career, as well as a mural created by noted Indigenous artist, curator, writer and Grand Ronde Tribal member Steph Littlebird. ■

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