

Tribe created Community Fund in 1997

**FUND continued
from front page**

Wednesday, Sept. 17, Community Fund Director Angela Sears told the assembled representatives that the awarded funds will not cover the needs of everyone who asked.

“Our grants process has always been competitive,” Sears said. “But this last year has been difficult for us and for so many of our non-profit partners, making our grant process incredibly competitive. In this cycle of large grant requests, we were only able to fund approximately 9% of the applications. Our small grants cycle was a little less competitive, with 28% funded... We are forced to leave a lot of amazing work on the table, simply because we don’t have the funds to support that many people. So, if you’re here today, that means the work you do is so important to us. So, congratulations for making it here today and thank you for the work you do.”

She added that the quarterly check presentation provides a way for the Community Fund to connect with grantees.

“It allows us to recognize and celebrate each of you for the incredible work that you’re doing and the much-needed support services that you provide for our most vulnerable. ... Having you here also allows us to share about who we are as the Spirit Mountain Community Fund and as the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde,” Sears said.

Tribal Council member Matthew Haller gave the invocation and played a Native American flute song for the gathering. Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier and Tribal Council members Tonya Gleason-Shepek and Kathleen George also joined the gathering, shaking hands with each check recipient.

The Tribe created the Community Fund as part of its gaming compact with the state of Oregon in 1997. It is supervised by an eight-member board of trustees that includes Tribal Council members Kathleen George, Lisa Leno and Haller. To date, the fund has given out 3,454 grants since it was founded, totaling \$101,780,662.

It receives 6 percent of the proceeds from Spirit Mountain Casino and awards the money to nonprofits in 11 northwest Oregon counties in the following categories: Arts and culture, environmental preservation, education, health, historic preservation and public safety. Grants also go to the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon, under the fund’s Tribal Grants program.

Empowering communities

Executive Director Rudolfo Serna Sr. describes Medicine Bear as a “nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering Native American, Latinx, and BIPOC communities through art, tradition, and stewardship. Our mission is to foster cultural connection, creative expression and a shared responsibility to the land and each other.”

Serna noted the nonprofit’s programs include The Redstone Collective, which brings art and



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Swallowtail Waldorf School and Farm Community Engagement & Development Coordinator Adesina Cameron is presented a Tri-logged blanket by Spirit Mountain Community Fund Grants Coordinator Jesse Knight, left, and SMCF Program Coordinator Angela Schlappie, right, that her organization won in a raffle drawing during the fund’s third-quarter check presentation in the Governance Center Atrium Wednesday, Sept. 17.

cultural workshops to systems-involved youth at juvenile detention centers and the Artist Apprenticeship Program, where young people work alongside professional artists to create public murals and develop leadership and artistic skills.

Serna told the assembled grant recipients that he first worked with Elders who were quietly performing cultural ceremonies and working with Indigenous people in the Portland area before suggesting it would help to create a nonprofit and apply for grants.

At first, they were not enthusiastic, preferring their informal system of mutual aid.

But, having succeeded in creating the Medicine Bear organization, Serna’s excited about the opportunity to continue the work. A second program offers mentorship, training and paid experience in public art to youth returning home and other system-impacted youth to help support them as they begin reintegrating into the community.

“Both components are rooted in cultural resilience and directly address underlying causes of youth incarceration (such as historical trauma and cultural disconnection) by integrating Indigenous and Latino traditions,” Serna said in his application.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Oregon and Southwest Washington operates four houses in Oregon, where families with children undergoing hospital treatment can stay free of charge. Meals and other services are also provided.

Community Engagement Manager Danny Harris said the grant will be used for the organization’s Eastern House to furnish an outdoor kitchen, therapeutic garden nooks, patios, fencing, landscaping and accessible playgrounds, all built with “trauma-informed design.”

“Families often stay weeks or months with us,” Harris said, explaining that the amenities are important to provide emotional re-

lief for both adults and children in a soothing natural setting, as well as ADA accessible playgrounds.

Chief Development Officer Lauren Olander explained in the organization’s application that the project is designed to transform the exterior “into a healing environment where children can play freely and safely, where parents can connect with one another, and where whole families can feel a sense of dignity, comfort and togetherness during their darkest days.”

In 2024, Olander wrote, “Approximately 28% of the families we supported (785) came from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund’s 11-county priority region, staying for a combined 7,297 nights at no cost.” That included 57 families from Polk County, and 20 families from Yamhill County.

The Community Fund provided 15 small grant awards totaling \$97,536 to the following organizations:

Small grant recipients

- Adopt One Block, \$7,500, for equitable environmental cleanups and empowered communities in Multnomah County;
- Ampkwa Advocacy, \$7,500, for the 2025 Murdered and Missing Indigenous Persons Walk and Community Healing Project;
- Bethel Education Foundation, \$4,000, for its Native Read and Feed events in Lane County;
- Creswell Clubhouse, \$5,000, for after school and summer enrichment programs in Lane County;
- Greater Oregon City Watershed Council, \$7,500, for Abernethy Creek Watershed lamprey education and outreach program in Clackamas County;
- Healthy Living Community, \$7,500, for expanding clinical care in Multnomah County;
- Medicine Bear, \$7,000, for Red-Stone Collective arts and culture program at the Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Center in Multnomah County;
- Operation Warm Inc., \$7,500, for

Warm Up Yamhill and Tillamook counties;

- Pacific Northwest Search and Rescue Inc., \$2,036, for a new kicker motor and install for a swift water rescue boat in Clackamas County;
- Red Lodge Transition Services, \$7,500, for a garage conversion project in Clackamas County;
- Sheltercare, \$7,000, for behavioral health work in Lane County;
- Stayton Public Library Foundation, \$5,000, for its 2025-26 outreach literacy program;
- Veterans Legacy, \$7,500, for a transport vehicle in Lane County;
- Walama Restoration Program, \$7,500, for its From Seed to Habitat education program in Lane County;
- Youth Music Project, \$7,500, for its mariachi camp, which leverages arts and culture to boost academics in Clackamas County.

The Community Fund provided 12 large grant awards totaling \$499,796 to the following organizations:

Large grants

- Boys & Girls Clubs of Emerald Valley, \$20,000, for its Resetting for Resiliency expansion to Bethel Community Hub in Lane County.
- Civics Learning Project, \$20,000, for experiential civics learning in Benton County;
- Latino Network, \$50,000, for operations support for a new culturally specific mental health clinic in Multnomah County;
- Native Fish Society, \$25,000, for its healthy rivers, wild fish community-led action for Willamette habitat;
- Painted Horse Recovery, \$43,234, for C’iyaal’s (Salmon) House in Multnomah County;
- Parrott Creek Child & Family Services, \$50,000, for its cultural ecology program about Indigenous land stewardship for adjudicated youth in Clackamas County;
- Portland Youthbuilders, \$20,000, for its YouthBuild High School Program’s Pathways to Success for At-Risk Youth in Multnomah County;
- Ronald McDonald Houses of Portland, \$100,000, for Care During Crisis: Supporting families through pediatric trauma in Multnomah County;
- Schoolhouse Supplies Inc., \$40,000, for its free store for teachers in 2025-26 in Multnomah County;
- Swallowtail Waldorf School and Farm, \$46,562, for its healing, land-rooted school for pre-K through eighth grade Indigenous learners in Washington County;
- The Blosser Center for Dyslexia Resources, \$45,000, for improving education for underserved students with literacy tutoring in Multnomah County;
- The Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality, \$40,000, for its Leyendo Avanzamos (Reading Together We Advance) program in Marion County.

After the grant awards were read, Swallowtail Waldorf School and Farm won a raffle for a Tribal Tri-logged blanket. ■