

TERO holds annual appreciation lunch, names worker of the year

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

The annual Tribal Employment Rights Office Appreciation Lunch was held Saturday, Nov. 15, at Spirit Mountain Casino’s Event Center to honor and highlight employees and projects in 2025, and to honor the worker of the year.

TERO Director Harris Reibach served as master of ceremonies, introducing speakers, presenting awards and announcing raffle winners while approximately 200 attendees enjoyed lunch and desserts.

Before lunch began, Reibach read aloud a tribute letter to the family of past TERO worker and Warm Springs Tribal Elder Sammy Bruised Head, who walked on Oct. 26.

“Sammy had a wealth of experience working with the Grand Ronde TERO program dating back to 2018,” Reibach said. “Since then, Sammy had been a great asset to our workforce, contributing and helping meet Tribal hiring goals in various capacities. We are sincerely grateful we had those opportunities to work with Sammy as she progressed along her journey within the construction trades. It is with deep sadness and a spirit of mourning that we send this letter to acknowledge your loss.”

Reibach took a moment to acknowledge all who had come out for the event, and noted it was the second time they had invited primary contractors for various Oregon Department of Transportation projects that employ TERO workers.

“This is just a small portion of the ODOT team and they are amazing,” Reibach said. “It’s so special to have a relationship with the DOT. There are only seven Tribes in the United States that have a relationship with their DOT.”

He noted that of those seven Tribes, three are located in Oregon: Grand Ronde, Umatilla and Warm Springs.

Then, Reibach introduced ODOT Director of Engagement and Civil Rights Serena Stoudamire Wesley, Office of Equity and Civil Rights Manager Angela Crane, Labor Equity Coordinator Michelle Ehara, Region One Coordinator Tricia Vrana and Region Two Coordinator



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Rob Roy (Yakama Nation) speaks after being named Tribal Employment Rights Office Worker of the Year during the TERO Appreciation Lunch at Spirit Mountain Casino’s Event Center Saturday, Nov. 15. Behind him are members of his crew that he brought on stage with him to be recognized.

Alyssa Soots.

Reibach acknowledged the Klamath Tribes TERO, who visited the Grand Ronde TERO program earlier this year after launching their program in early 2025.

“They are now the fourth and newest TERO in the state of Oregon, Reibach said. “We’re hoping that they can be another Tribe to get an MOU that way.”

Reibach introduced employees in the TERO program, which include Senior Compliance Officer Duke Kimsey, Compliance Officer Matt Lux, Training and Development Coordinator Jacob Boekhoff, Senior Administrative Assistant Caden Leno, Administrative Assistant Kristy Summers and Khofi Haws Lead Barista Ariel Hunt. Past TERO staff member Lori Sterling was also in attendance.

Then, Reibach mentioned TERO Commission members in attendance, which included Sterling and fellow Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Perri McDaniel.

Reibach thanked Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier, the Tribe’s Human Resources Department and Tribal 477 Employment and Training Program for attending the lunch.

Lunch and dessert were followed by raffle prize drawings, an explanation of the various services TERO

provides and project statistics, among other presentations.

“We’re going to talk a bit about 2025,” Reibach said. “Overall, it’s been an awesome year. It seems like every single year we just grow, learn more, do more and get on more projects. In 2025, the TERO program has been on a total of 30 projects. The Tribal projects and ODOT projects are the main ones we’re on.”

He mentioned the Tribe’s Wind River Apartments, with 10 buildings and 45 units being added to Tribal housing, as one of the big projects, along with the Interstate 205 Abernathy Bridge project.

“We’re talking hundreds of millions of dollars,” Reibach said. “It’s the biggest project we’ve ever been on actually. So, we keep a lot of people dispatched to that project.”

Overall, in 2025, TERO participated in 31 projects and 90 new workers registered with the program, up from 51 the past year. There were 77 active workers on jobsites.

“For total hours and wages, and this is always something I’m harping on here, I call it food in the fridge and shoes on the feet,” Reibach said. “These are real, tangible numbers...these total hours and wages, that’s actual money going into the pockets of people who work hard for that. Total hours for 2025 were 28,088 and total wages were \$1.1 million. That’s a big deal and we’re proud of that.”

Mercier spoke about how the Grand Ronde TERO program has grown since the early days when it was just a discussion amongst Tribal leaders.

“I’m really impressed by the turnout and remember the days we were just discussing the program,” he said. “For the longest time, it was just something the council talked about. A couple of the Tribal leaders who helped make it happen – Wink Soderberg and Steve Bobb Sr. – they’re no longer with us. I know if they were here, they’d be really proud about what they’re seeing, how much the program has grown and how many people it has helped.”

McDaniel and Sterling spoke on

behalf of the commission. They said that Grand Ronde TERO has the best program that they have seen in Indian Country.

“I started working for the Tribe about 30 years ago and started advocating for a TERO program back then,” McDaniel said. “I think I’m probably the longest-standing advocate for TERO. The growth of the program is just amazing and unprecedented.”

Added Sterling, “I’m very happy to still be a part of TERO. I worked in the office for several years and now I’m on the commission. I know how hard the staff works. It’s amazing and none of it happens if you don’t work together.”

After ODOT and various contractors had the opportunity to speak, there were open mic opportunities.

Contractors who attended included Stotts Construction, High Quality Traffic Control, Knife River Construction, Wildish Construction Co., Brown Construction, Legacy Contracting Inc., Roger Langeliers Construction, Just Bucket Excavating Inc., Kiewit Bridge and Marine, Suulutaaq Inc., CG Contractors and Eugene Williams Asphalt.

Toward the end of the event, the TERO Worker of the Year award was presented to Yakama Nation Tribal member Robert Roy Jr., who was also a TERO Worker of the Month in March 2023.

“This young warrior joined our TERO program in 2022 and was soon dispatched to one of our (memorandum of understanding) ODOT heavy highway construction projects,” Reibach said. “He has been a great asset to not only our TERO program but a key employee on each and every project he has been assigned to. He started out as a general laborer and has since been promoted to foreman in about a two-year period. That is not an easy task to accomplish, which most people in this room can attest to. He has been a great advocate for our TERO program as well.”

Reibach noted that Roy, “sees the importance of getting our Native people out on these projects to show that our people are capable of not only doing the work but running these multimillion-dollar projects.”

“He is now the foreman of an all-Native crew on a half a billion-dollar project. He has helped the TERO dispatcher put together this all-Native crew which supersedes any work crew that our program has done to this day. He is well-versed when it comes to the rights that our program has for our Natives. He stands strong as a Native man and is not afraid to stick up for the rights of our people in the industry. There are many challenges in the position which he holds, and he is very well-spoken when it comes to getting the job done, whether it be with his supervisors or with his crew.”

Roy was presented with a Tribal Pendleton blanket, \$200 Cabela’s gift card, plaque, one-night stay at Spirit Mountain Casino with a \$50 meal comp and a two-hour bay rental for six guests at the TopGolf swing suite.

The event concluded with a final raffle and photos. ■

Culture Committee Cultural Craft Classes

10-4pm

December 14th @ CTGR Community Center

Come make new projects, work on old projects!
Tribal families welcomed!!
All ages!!

Questions? Please reach out to the Culture Committee:
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