

# Telling the Story of Injustice and Peace / Grand Ronde Women – Our Story



The native peoples of Grand Ronde have endured a challenging history. Beginning in 1855 all the Native Americans of Western Oregon – 26 different tribes and bands – were taken from homelands on which they had lived for thousands of years and confined to the Grand Ronde reservation, a timbered area where farming was impossible. One hundred years later, tribal lands and identity were “terminated” by the U.S. government in a 1954 law, that devastated tribal health, culture and economy. Through legal battles the tribe reestablished recognition in 1984.

Shortly after this “restoration,” a fraction of their original reservation land was returned to them.

It’s been a hard history.

“But tribal women are resilient,” says Grand Ronde tribal elder, librarian and basket weaver Marion Mercier. “Historically Grand Ronde women have adapted to every change that came along and created good lives for their children in spite of the hardships.”

The story of Grand Ronde women will be made available April 6th through May 28th at the Willamette Heritage Center at the Mill when the exhibit *shawash ill?i luchmən – ntsayka ikanum: Grand Ronde Women – Our Story* will show the importance of women to the Native community in western Oregon with photographs, handmade cultural treasures, murals and the living voices of these survivors.

Bringing the tale of native peoples to Salem seems natural to tribal elder and Tribal Chair Cheryle Kennedy. “In our culture certain sites are known for gathering,” she told the Salem Weekly. “Salem is one of those important sites, because of our history with the river.”



<http://www.willamettelive.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/grweb.jpg>

The displays will include a video telling the important story of the reservation onto which native peoples were pushed 150 years ago, after being forced to cede their vaster, better lands to the government. It will also describe the crushing effects of the termination law of 1954 which shattered the tribe's identity. Kathleen Tom, tribal elder and Council Member, says, "Nowadays we're in the educational phase. Now is the time to tell the story of termination and restoration."

2012 is the second year of an important collaboration between the Heritage Center and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde following the "Canoe Journey" of spring 2011. Peter Booth, Executive Director of the Willamette Heritage Center couldn't be more pleased. "Ever since I moved to Salem," he says, "I have been amazed at how little Salem's residents know about the Willamette Valley's Native Peoples. I am also proud that the Board, Staff and volunteers of our museum is working closely with Grand Ronde in correcting the many misconceptions that can be found in the Salem community about the area's first residents. "

Women have always held influence in Native society. They were essential before outsiders came and in the days of the fur trade. They brought cohesion during harsh reservation times. During WWII they even went up to Portland to find work in the shipyards. Today they continue to hold key positions in Grand Ronde in their work in education, in the arts, in health care and as entrepreneurs.

Dr. David Lewis, who leads the Cultural Resource Department for the Grand Ronde community, tells us, "Here we look at women leaders different than white society does. In many ways we follow women's lead and in many ways they have led us to where we are today. "The exhibit is really a message of hope," Marion Mercier says. "Indian women are still here and still practicing traditions and arts. Some in the general public don't think there are as many Indians in Oregon as there are, or that they're all just like everyone else. But we're still here and still moving forward."

Several additional events will be offered to support and compliment the exposition.

For complete details visit [willametteheritage.org](http://willametteheritage.org)

### **April 7**

Book Signing and Presentation: June Olson, Great Circle, The Grand Ronde Reservation: 1855-1905, 1:30 pm – 2:30 pm in the Church. Free.

June Olson, former manager of CTGR's Cultural Resources Department, has published this unique look at the first generation to call the Grand Ronde Reservation home.

Panel: Grand Ronde Women Leaders: Former US Representative Elizabeth Furse, Moderator, 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm in the Church. Free to CTGR and WHC members, \$2 students with ID, \$5 non-members.

Always important to the Native community of western Oregon, women were especially instrumental in securing Grand Ronde's restoration of tribal recognition. They continue to provide valuable leadership for the community today. This discussion about the triumphs and challenges they and the People encountered will include former Tribal Chair Kathryn Harrison, current Tribal Chair Cheryle Kennedy and Council Member Kathleen Tom

### **April 24**

Chinuk Wawa Language Presentation and Class

Presented by Dr. Henry Zenk, University of Oregon and Kathy Cole, CTGR Cultural Education Coordinator  
11:00 am – 1:00 pm in the Church. Free.

The Cultural Resources Department of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde is working to preserve the language that was once a common trade language among the western Oregon Native Peoples – Chinuk Wawa. In the first hour, Henry Zenk will speak about his recently published Chinuk Wawa dictionary. In the second hour, Kathy Cole will lead a Chinuk Wawa class with elders and youth in a school-like setting.

### **May 12**

Grand Ronde Weaving Demonstration

11:00 pm – 3:00 pm, part of Sheep to Shawl. Free.

Weaving has long been a tradition among Northwest Native Peoples. This art form survives among the Grand Ronde community. Native weavers Connie Graves, Margaret Mathewson, Stephanie Wood and others will demonstrate contemporary basket weaving at the WHC's 28th Annual Sheep to Shawl. Examples of their work will also be available.

### **May 19**

Grand Ronde Dance Demonstration and Presentation

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm. \$2 Students, \$3 WHC and CTGR members, \$5 non-members.

Led by CTGR Language and Cultural Specialist Bobby Mercier, community members will demonstrate the beauty and rhythm of western Oregon Native Dance and Music.

© 2012 [Willamette Live \(http://www.willamettelive.com\)](http://www.willamettelive.com)