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FEATURED TOP STORY

Klamath Tribes Youth Council: 'Keep Tobacco Sacred'

By FRANCISCA BENITEZ H&N Staff Reporter 15 hrs ago

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The “Keep Tobacco Sacred” campaign by the Klamath Tribes Youth Council is aimed at encouraging teens not to use tobacco products.

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CHILOQUIN — The Klamath Tribes Youth Council hosted a luncheon at the “goos oLgi gawa” community center in Chiloquin on Tuesday with members of the community and the media to launch their campaign, titled “Keep Tobacco Sacred.”

The luncheon was supported by Klamath County Public Health. The speakers were Klamath Tribes Youth Council Chair Hannah Schroeder, Klamath County Commissioner Kelley Minty Morris and Regional Health Equity Coordinator at Klamath County Public Health, Valeree Lane.

The Klamath Tribes Youth Council comprises 16 members from schools in the area. In collaboration with Klamath County Public Health, the council created the “Keep Tobacco Sacred” campaign to encourage teens not to abuse nicotine and tobacco products.

“In Native communities especially, commercial tobacco is accepted as a social norm,” said 16-year-old Schroeder in her speech.

The CDC reports that Native Americans have the highest prevalence of cigarette smoking compared to all other racial/ethnic groups in the United States, noting this is due to the fact that tobacco is used culturally for ceremonial, religious, or medicinal purposes.

“Commercial tobacco is not sacred,” Schroeder said. “Commercial tobacco is hazardous to our health. Misuse of tobacco is not something our ancestors would be proud of. We as a youth council encourage all tribal people to keep it traditional: smoke meat, smoke fish, smoke hides, but do not smoke commercial tobacco.”

Schroeder said nicotine products are extremely prevalent in her high school. She recalled a time that she had to miss class to help her friend who had suddenly become extremely sick from taking a nicotine tablet at school.

“She had had a nicotine tab and she was so dizzy. I had to help her out,” she said. She said she is passionate about this campaign because she wants to help not only other teenagers, but everyone avoid the health consequences that come with abusing nicotine.

Commissioner Minty Morris applauded the efforts of the Youth Council, saying the issue of nicotine use in schools is universal in Klamath County.

“Klamath County School District principals recently indicated they believe that up to 50% of high school students are carrying a nicotine delivery system with them to and from school,” she said.

Minty Morris said city officials are working to create policies that stop youth from being able to access nicotine products, but said students who want to find them will find ways.

“It is my sincere hope that other students around Klamath County listen to the Klamath Tribes Youth Council and embrace the notion that commercial tobacco has no place in a healthy lifestyle,” she said.

Minty Morris also called attention to vaping, saying, “I am asking Klamath County Public Health to make youth vaping a priority issue, and to bring a proposal in front of the board of commissioners before school resumes this fall.”

The 2017 Healthy Teens Survey showed Klamath County teens using nicotine and tobacco products more than the state average. It said 4.7% of eighth-graders reported that they smoke cigarettes, compared to the state average of 3%. And, 0.4% of eighth-graders indicated that they had smoked cigarettes every single day for the last 30 days, compared to the state average of 0%.