

Bodies found on tribal grounds

CHEYENNE (AP) — The FBI and Bureau of Indian Affairs police were investigating the deaths of three people whose bodies were found Wednesday at a housing complex on the Wind River Indian Reservation, tribal and FBI officials said.

Jonathan Barela, assistant director of the Northern Arapaho Tribe's public-relations department, said the people died Wednesday morning in a residence at the Beaver Creek Housing Development, a tribal complex located a few miles south of Riverton.

He said no information had been released on the identities or the cause of death.

"There are a lot of rumors that do take place, as with any community," Barela said. "At the present time, because the investigation is in the hands of the FBI, their strategic plan is to gather all the information first and then release a statement. Unfortunately, the Northern Arapaho tribal members can only speculate at this time."

FBI Special Agent Kathleen Wright said her agency was working with BIA police to investigate the deaths.

She said she could not comment on whether investigators suspected foul play, and she could not release any information on the victims.

The Wind River Indian Reservation covers more than 3,400 square miles in mountainous central-western Wyoming, about 230 miles northwest of Cheyenne. The reservation is home to both the Northern Arapaho Tribe, which has 8,670 members, and the Eastern Shoshone Tribe, which has 4,200 members.

Ivan Posey, chairman of the Eastern Shoshone Business Council, the tribe's governing body, said he was notified of the deaths Wednesday morning. He said he was awaiting an update from the investigating authorities.

"I know there's stuff flying around the community and talking, but I still don't think anybody has the real story yet," Posey said. "Out of respect for the victims and their families, we don't want to comment any further until we get more information."

Barela said the Fremont County coroner was assisting in the case and that the bodies were being taken to Loveland, Colo., for autopsies.

Phone messages left for the Fremont County coroner were not returned Wednesday. The chief of the BIA's reservation police department in Ethete could not be reached for comment.

Dance keeps memory of teen alive

By Karen Klinka
The Oklahoman

OKLAHOMA CITY — When the young women line up today for the Red Earth festival's Teen Girls Fancy Shawl Dance in memory of Rose Saddleblanket, longtime family friend Cindy Banta will be watching.

Banta thinks that somewhere Rose, the 16-year-old girl she loved like a daughter, will be watching, too.

The teen shawl dance is one of several contests being held as part of the 22nd annual Red Earth Native American Cultural Festival and Dance Competition, winding up today at the Cox Convention Center.

The Red Earth dance competition is one of the rare times when dancers from America's Northern and Southern tribes, each wearing distinctive tribal dress, come together in one venue. This year, more than 250 dancers from about 100 tribes are participating.

Today, the dancers' Grand Entry will be at noon, with the dance finals from 1 to 4 p.m. The dance awards presentation will begin at 4:30 p.m.

Policy on feathers violates rights of student

By Venita Jenkins
Fayetteville Observer

LUMBERTON, N.C. — A school system policy that prohibits a Robeson County student from wearing an eagle feather during his graduation is unreasonable and violates his rights, two civil rights groups say.

The Native American Rights Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union on Thursday sent a letter to Robeson County school officials expressing their concerns about a policy that prevents Corey Bird from wearing two eagle feathers on his graduation gown or cap. Corey, a senior at Purnell Swett High School in Pembroke, is scheduled to graduate June 13.

Katherine Parker, legal director with ACLU North Carolina, said the policy is bad and violates the rights of Corey and his father, Samuel Bird.

"We urge the school district to rethink its short-sighted decision," Parker said.

American Indian tribes

use eagle feathers for ceremonial purposes. Corey Bird wants to wear them to honor his mother and grandfather, who are both deceased, and for cultural and spiritual significance. The feathers were a gift from his father for graduation.

Bird, 18, is Lumbee and a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton tribe, a federally recognized tribe in South Dakota.

Superintendent Johnny Hunt could not be reached for comment. During an interview last month, Hunt said the policy was in place to prevent disruption.

"If you start allowing things to be worn, it would set a precedent that would allow whatever group or organization to wear whatever, and it could cause disruption during the ceremony," he said at the time.

Steve Moore, senior staff attorney with the Native American Rights Fund in Boulder, Colo., said other schools have struggled with this issue and have understood that permitting the wearing of the eagle feathers

at graduation is not only good policy, "but the right thing to do from a human perspective."

"About the last 15 to 20 years, the vast majority of cases such as this have been resolved without the need of litigation and in favor of Native American students," Moore said. "Hopefully this will provoke some discussion and a resolution. No one here is edging for a fight."

NARF and the ACLU understand the purpose of the policy, but both organizations say there should be exceptions for people who deeply hold their spiritual and religious beliefs.

"I think it is understandable that the school districts are concerned about opening the door to other kinds of things," Parker said. "But it is a different situation when you are talking about spiritual and religious beliefs. I do think they are sort of making a mountain out of a mole hill here. There are legitimate and legal ways of preventing this from getting out of hand, such as limiting

it to sincere religiously held beliefs."

Corey Bird told Purnell Swett Principal Antonio Wilkins in February of his plans to wear the feathers. Wilkins told him at that time that he could not wear them on his cap but that he could wear them on his gown, Bird said.

During a senior meeting May 20, Bird was told that he could not wear the feathers because a school policy prohibits the wearing of messages, signs, markings and ribbons on caps and gowns. Students who violate the rule can be removed from the graduation line and not allowed to walk across the stage.

Bird and his father plan to make their case before the Robeson County school board Tuesday night.

Samuel Bird said he would like to reach a resolution. "This is something that I have been planning for years," he said.

Several American Indian students have worn feathers on their graduation outfits in the past and nothing was

said, Samuel Bird said.

"The only difference between those students and Corey is that he asked first," Samuel Bird said.

If the school board decides to uphold its policy, Samuel Bird said he would probably file a lawsuit the following day.

"We will let the courts decide before graduation," he said.

John Campbell, chairman of the Robeson County school board, said the system's policy is gray and should be examined.

"Some think that this might open up a Pandora's box for everybody and every cause," he said. "But I think we can set up a process to evaluate any request that might come in for an exemption of the policy and judge each on its merits."

Campbell added, "We certainly want the community to feel like they are stakeholders and partners in the Public Schools of Robeson County. I don't see the need to alienate any population in our school community."

S'Klallam tribe shares donations with area schools

Kelly Joines
North Kitsap Herald

LITTLE BOSTON, Wash. — The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe is helping to bridge the financial gap in local education programs. On Friday, the tribe awarded more than \$26,900 to 18 non-profit organizations with money earned from its Point No Point Casino.

Because of recent North Kitsap School District budget cuts, the majority of the money was awarded to local schools.

"This time we helped a lot of school programs that don't have a lot of funding right now like special education, reading programs and credit retrieval programs," said Kara Horton, PGST executive assistant. "Schools suffer a lot in budget cuts."

Tribal Chairman Ron Charles said requests to fund school projects is nothing new.

"We like to support them because they aren't getting the money from the school district because the budget is so tight," he said. "I think with the way we're reading about the school district's budget they are hit hard with the fuel crises, too."

The Port Gamble S'Klallam award money comes from Appendix X funds — a provision compacted by Native American Tribes and Washington state legislature, which mandates 2 percent of tribal casino's net profits are awarded to non-profit agencies. Each tribe that owns a casino has Appendix X, Horton said.

"The organizations we chose are some of the most important to the tribe," she said.



Tsa'imaay dancers from the Tsimshian tribe dance during the Celebration 2008 parade on Franklin Street, in Juneau, Alaska Saturday. Celebration 2008 marks the 26th year of the three-day dance-and-culture festival. Event planners anticipate 5,000 people from Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian heritage will attend, including 52 dance groups and approximately 2,300 dancers from Alaska, Canada and the contiguous United States.

Associated Press

Greektown casino projects \$15.9M loss in '08

Nathan Hurst
The Detroit News

DETROIT — Greektown Casino is expected to lose \$15.9 million this year as its bottom line absorbs \$13.5 million in bankruptcy restructuring costs and \$51 million in loan interest payments, a financial adviser for the troubled gambling facility told a state panel Thursday.

"Most of this loss is related to the bankruptcy restructuring costs," Charles Moore of Conway MacKenzie & Dunleavy, a financial consulting firm working on Greektown's reorganization, told members of the Michigan Gaming Control Board. "Significant debt payments are also a factor."

Moore laid out Greektown's financials at a board meeting called specifically to discuss emergency financing for the casino.

The board voted 4-1 to approve a \$51.3 million loan

package that got the approval of a U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge on Wednesday. Greektown said it needed the money to pay contractors working on its \$332 million permanent gaming facility and 400-room resort-style hotel. That project is expected to wrap up by the beginning of next year.

Greektown filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization last week, saying it will continue operations while it refinances millions of dollars in loans needed to finish the casino-hotel project.

The \$51.3 million in emergency funding is expected to be in place as early as today, according to a lawyer representing Merrill Lynch, Greektown's primary banking institution. The bank mandated the Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing as a condition of its loan to Greektown.

Greektown is seeking a total of \$150 million in financing. The remainder will come

before the bankruptcy court at a later date.

Greektown also revealed Thursday its terms for a bankruptcy exit, which Moore said would happen "sometime in 2009." By Feb. 29, Greektown will have to seek bids for a sale of the completed casino-hotel complex or financing sufficient to exit bankruptcy. Final offers would be due by June 1, Moore said.

Gaming rules still in effect. In approving Greektown's financing, gaming board Chairman Damian Kassab warned that the bankruptcy wouldn't stand in the board's way of enforcing its regulations, including trying to force a sale of the gaming hall.

Kassab also criticized Merrill Lynch for failing to provide information to board staffers in advance of the bankruptcy. Also on Kassab's list of concerns: "management, cost overruns, delay after delay and more debt," he

said.

Voting no on the financing was Benjamin Friedman, who noted the concerns of some members of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Greektown's majority owner. They believe the casino should've been sold years ago because of mounting debts related to the casino expansion project.

Moore, the casino's financial adviser, said that without the massive construction debt, Greektown's casino operation would be profitable next year.

Greektown's projected 2008 loss comes after a \$2 million profit on revenues of \$314.6 million in 2007, according to bankruptcy court records. The expected loss won't affect wagering taxes paid to the state of Michigan and city of Detroit, because those are based on revenues, not profits.

Casino deal may fall through

Also at Thursday's hearing, Moore said a deal with Entertainment Interests Group to buy a 40 percent interest in Greektown may fall through.

The Bloomfield Hills-based equity partnership led by Jerry Campbell, the investor behind the Pinnacle Race Track facility being built near Detroit Metropolitan Airport, offered \$79 million for the 40 percent stake and another \$21 million to pay debts owed to previous minority investors.

A week ago, when Greektown announced it had filed for Chapter 11, a principal partner with EIG said the deal with Greektown will move forward. But Thursday, when asked to respond to Moore's statements, EIG said in a statement: "We have a binding agreement. The sellers and their professionals have failed to live up to that agreement. We intend to enforce our rights and remedies and have given notice to that effect."