

**Andrea**

Welcome everyone to our podcast. My name is Andrea Taylor and I am the Public Information Assistant. Here with the Siletz Tribe in the Public Information Department and today we have Kurtis Barker. Kurtis, welcome.

**Kurtis**

Thank you. It's good to be here.

**Andrea**

So, Kurtis, tell us a little bit about yourself. What is your position here? What are you what are you doing?

**Kurtis**

Well, currently, I'm the tribe's chief executive officer, which means that I basically oversee all sides of the tribal government, which is kind of separate from the other branches that we have within the tribe. So I don't oversee the business entities or any of the casino operations. So my role is basically over the government operations side.

**Andrea**

Okay. And what other positions have you held here?

**Kurtis**

I actually started for the tribe in 2006. I started in a clerical position within the self-sufficiency program as kind of like a program assistant to the director. And I provided staff support and assistance to some of the clients. And I primarily spent my whole career, I think, since I was 20 or 21 with the tribe in the self-sufficiency program, before I sort of advanced into this role that I am at now.

**Kurtis**

So I started as a clerical position and I, went through a whole bunch of training and ended up becoming a caseworker, becoming a compliance officer within the department. And before I ended up becoming the director for about eight, eight or nine years, I think, before I advanced this position in, was that 2022?

**Andrea**

I believe so.

**Kurtis**

So, yeah. February of 22. Yeah.

**Andrea**

Because it was right after elections, or right before elections.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, right before election. Yeah. Yeah. two years now in this role last month.

**Andrea**

So good job, good job! So it's the classic tale of, you know, working your way up.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. Started as a, as a clerk. Did as much training as I could. I went to. I went, got my bachelor's degree. I think I started school when I was 30. ended up getting a bachelor's degree in business administration and that pretty much right after that, I moved right into this real job.

**Andrea**

So let's, let's ask you a couple of questions about you. Like, how are you? Like, what are your hobbies? What do you do when you're not, you know, running the tribe here?

**Kurtis**

In the little free time that I do get, you can probably always find me - I'm always out camping. Usually most weekends, I'm out with friends, friends and family. We like to visit Sand Lake a lot. So we all have quads and campers and all summer long and throughout the fall, we're always camping.

**Andrea**

So I feel like that might answer my next question. I was going to wonder, what's your favorite season?

**Kurtis**

It has to be probably summer. Um, I like to be outdoors, but I also like fall because, the change up, the seasons, it's just a different dynamic.

**Andrea**

I like fall because I like the way it smells. Like there's something about the air that smells crisp. I don't know, it doesn't make sense, but that's the way it is for me.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. And it's just like road trips in the fall are always the best. The changing of the trees.

**Andrea**

Yeah. Ah. So what about, like, vacations you've taken what's your, what's your favorite vacation? What's your dream vacation. One that you aspire to have maybe someday.

**Kurtis**

I think my dream vacation was right before I got this role. I went on a backpacking trip with a friend in Europe for three weeks. So started in, started in London and then went to, like, Germany. We were in Amsterdam, in Wales to spend three weeks, no more than a couple of days in each spot and just taking the trains, just different cities and spending most of our time off beaten paths, not trying to visit those huge touristy areas.

**Kurtis**

We like to be in the small towns.

**Andrea**

And actually experience the culture versus the tourist destination.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, I actually met some people that way that I'm still in contact with today, just from you get to interact with people differently, the locals differently than, than you do in those big touristy areas. So, that was my first time out of the country, but it was pretty amazing. And I would probably say my next dream vacation would be doing the same thing, but probably starting in a different area in Europe.

**Kurtis**

I think the next place I want to go is, I'd start in Spain and then go up backpacking through like France and then over to Italy and so if I ever get a chance, I can take three weeks off at once. That's probably my next adventure.

**Andrea**

I like that goal, I like that goal for you. I want that for you.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. I'm going to have to probably pressure Lisa into giving me some time off.

**Andrea**

I will tell Lisa that I'm advocating for you to have a vacation. I'm going to probably say that that's not in an immediacy thing. Probably next year.

**Kurtis**

Yeah.

**Andrea**

You don't plan something like that with, you know, the for this summer. Yeah. All right. I'll advocate for that for you. All right, So let's dive into why we're here today. Why are we starting this podcast? What is what is you know, what is the endgame here?

**Kurtis**

Well, I think when I started in this position, one of my main goals was just sort of modernizing our approach to how we do business in all aspects of how we do business. So not just our systems, but our policies and how we get information out to the membership is a big piece of that.

**Kurtis**

So this is just another avenue of providing information to the membership directly from the administration and directly from the tribe.

**Kurtis**

It's just a new way of doing it that the younger membership probably will connect with better than probably some of our older membership.

**Kurtis**

But it's just a new way of providing information to a new way of being transparent. There's a lot of information that we see that's available or posted online, whether it's Facebook or, and it's just sort of a way for us to be, or provide that direct connection to the membership so that, that transparency is there, that accurate information is being provided to the membership and that we're just engaging in a different way.

**Kurtis**

We're engaging in a more modern way than, then we've done before.

**Andrea**

Right? Good. I like that. So what, what info, I guess, are we trying to provide in this podcast too, You know, in our modernization steps?

**Kurtis**

Well, I think as it picks up steam or as as people become more familiar with it, that we hope the membership will provide feedback on what they want to hear on the podcast. But to start off, I was going to do a monthly podcast on just, things that the administration is working on our goals, our objectives, the latest updates on things that council has approved, different objectives that they have, that the different messaging that they want to get out to the membership.

**Kurtis**

We also want to highlight programs. So one podcast will be myself for Lisa providing updates, but then a second podcast during the month specifically targeted towards the programs and services that we offer.

**Andrea**

Right. And how they work and how to maybe apply for them or what they're doing to serve our members.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, and those services or eligibility requirements change quite often or there's new services that come available in the middle of the year or different times during the year that we want to make sure that we're highlighting those so that the membership can take advantage of them.

**Andrea**

Good! So we're kind of we kind of dabbled in a, it little bit, but what is what is our target audience? Who are we wanting to reach?

**Kurtis**

Well, I believe we're going to have the podcast on the public facing page of the website. But, the primary target would be tribal members, and then anybody who's interested in learning more about the tribe and staying connected with the tribe, but primarily I see the younger generation probably connecting with the podcast more until it picks up. Maybe it becomes a really popular thing where we do want to put it on one of those public networks.

**Kurtis**

I don't know exactly what you call it, but.

**Andrea**

A podcast platform. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So we can post it on multiple modes so that where people can listen to it. You know, iTunes or Google, or you know - Apple, Amazon has one, Spotify, others.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, that's got to become something that, that happens in the future. But right now it's just about providing information, membership.

**Andrea**

Correct. All right. Well, let's jump into some of our 2023 accomplishments. I know we're at the beginning still 'ish as the years going by much faster than I anticipated it to already. But let's talk about some of the accomplishments we had in 2023. What do you have to report on that?

**Kurtis**

2023 was sort of a big year. I was out for part of the year, but that we spent a lot of effort, on sort of rebuilding our, our workforce. We had a lot of key vacant positions open, so it was really bringing people on onboarding new, new positions and sort of stabilizing some of our bigger departments, human resources being one of those and the clinic.

**Kurtis**

And that was one of the things that we focused on. We also have several huge projects that are coming online. So in 2023 we had a huge focus on maintaining our progress with different ARPA projects as the American Rescue Plan, where the tribe received a significant amount of funding through COVID, or as a result of COVID. So, all of the legwork that takes place now on the rec center, on the pharmacy, on these different projects that will cover coverage here in a bit.

**Kurtis**

But the design phase is huge and it takes a lot of time, right? So working with the architects and getting community feedback and making sure that these projects align with what Tribal Council was asking for and it takes a lot of time and effort behind the scenes before anybody sees any of that progress come to fruition.

**Andrea**

Right. All the surveying and making sure that we can connect, you know, water, sewer power to certain locations. And it's not it's not, you know, a throw a hat kind of thing and we're done.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. You just can't come up with a plan, for example, the pharmacy here. And so let's just start building it. There's environmental assessments. You have to engage with the city, there's permitting requirements. And so those things take a lot of time. And 2023 was sort of laying the foundation for getting all of those that design done. Then I think as you see in 2024, all of those big projects are going to be coming online, huge construction projects within Siletz.

**Andrea**

Good! So let's get into some really recent, you know, accomplishments that we're doing. What are we what are we actively trying to get done right now?

**Kurtis**

Well, there's actually a lot going on. The administration sort of oversees a large number of projects and different efforts.

**Kurtis**

We have. there's also a specific funding. We're working with all of our entities right now. So the administration, the Casino, STBC, and the Gaming Commission on a cybersecurity grant that we also submitted last month. So we'll hopefully hear something back on that within the next month. But that grant will just sort of allow all of our entities to boost our resiliency against cybersecurity attacks, which we've seen has been a growing threat not just within the administration, but different business entities and casinos have been targeted.

**Kurtis**

So hopefully this grant will be, well it's specific to tribes, but we're really hopeful on that grant as well that we'll be able to hopefully modernize our systems to be more resilient on cybersecurity, tech.

**Andrea**

To detect it faster, to prevent catastrophic takeover.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, there's been even some recent at large organizations within the Northwest that have been the targets of cybersecurity, and we don't want to be one of them.

**Andrea**

Right.

**Kurtis**

So we're really hopeful of that. That project moving forward. And even if the, the grant isn't funded, all of the entities, including the administration, that created sort of like an ad hoc committee that will focus on cybersecurity resiliency and we'll just have to provide that sort of service ourselves. Seeking funding and identifying the most vulnerable things that face the organization and sort of taking those head on.

**Andrea**

Okay. So either way, it's going to have to get done.

**Kurtis**

Yes. So we can't ignore it. The threats are growing and they're constant.

**Andrea**

Right. All right, well let's dive into our goals for 2024. What are we trying to accomplish? What are we trying to achieve before the year is up?

**Kurtis**

Well, the administration has many large, significant goals that we've identified. And we just had a, an administration retreat with the tribal council earlier this week. We spent two days with them sort of going over each goal and objective and more detail in a way that's identified as a goal. So some of the things that we've identified is stabilizing our human resources department.

**Kurtis**

We've had some significant turnover that's, I always consider sort of the heart of the organization. So that we've been without a director for a while. So we're actively recruiting for that. But that just provides a lot of stable stability for the organization when that department is fully staffed. So that's one of the primary goals, is focusing on support for the Human Resources department.

**Kurtis**

As we mentioned a bit ago, it's ensuring that all of our ARPA projects are on time. We have a timeline of getting all of those funds from ARPA under contract by the end of this year. Okay. So if we don't have those funds in their contract, then we end up having to send funds back.

**Andrea**

Well, I don't wanna do that.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. So it's, it's a lot of money that the tribe received as part of COVID, and we don't want to be in a position where we're sending those funds back.

**Andrea**

So. Right, right. Because that would just that would that be a disservice almost kind of to ourselves like as our goal to, to move forward. That would that would be sad.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. And we're a lot farther than other organizations that have received ARPA funds. So I mean, that's a really good for us. But these projects are so big that we train to contractors to do a \$20 million project, and so that's could

be a little bit difficult. the rec center is one of those projects that the Lincoln City Clinic, and a pharmacy are making really good progress right now.

**Kurtis**

but yeah, that's a huge priority for the administration and the tribe is to get all of those, all of those funds under contract.

**Andrea**

So you talked about the rec center. Are we allowed to talk about that, what are we... Uh, what are we doing? Yeah, I know people talk about it, but I don't. I don't even know what all is going to be at the rec center.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, It's been a goal of the tribe for a long time. I believe it's been in our comprehensive plan for many, many years to develop a more of a place where youth can go to receive programming, whether it's an after school program or there's a lot of people that want to see a pool in Siletz.

**Kurtis**

But after COVID, the cost of building almost doubled. It's outrageous.

**Andrea**

Oh yeah.

**Kurtis**

So, we prioritized a significant amount. It's probably about 40% of what came in from ARPA for our recreation center in Siletz. And so that's so that project is currently out to bid. So we do have the final designs done. it's been put out to bid. I believe the bid closing is early April, so we should have somebody under contract by the end of April or May before construction starts.

**Kurtis**

But this center is more recreation based, so it's going to have two full size collegiate courts. you know, our gym, to the Tilikum Fitness center will end up moving into this rec center.

**Andrea**

so you'll be able to get a workout both like, machine style and play basketball?

**Kurtis**

Yeah, it's, it's a more comprehensive rec center, so it'll have different workout rooms. It'll have, like, a court. it has several office space. A lot of our storage for the diabetes program for other summer activities, like, you know, their rafts, and kayaks that tribal members can rent for free, that has storage for that. And then above the indoor, above the collegiate courts is an indoor walking or running track, elevated above the court.

**Andrea**

I like that.

**Kurtis**

Similar to the Newport Recreation Center. So you can get that exercise and do that running and walking all year long, basically.

**Andrea**

So similar to how Eugene and Salem have walking groups. We could do a walking group once that is built, and diabetes or community health could start that and they could do, you know, an hour of walking together.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, I think once it's built we'll be able to do a lot more programming and even staff on wellness, or competitions or whatever it may be, that the diabetes program is really good about developing.

**Andrea**

I like that and I'm super excited about that. So are there any other project updates that we might have missed that you want to talk about and let our members know about and get them excited?

**Kurtis**

Well, there's, I can cover, some of the other projects that have been budgeted within ARPA because some of those projects have already been completed. you know, the, the eight-plex over here, our apartment complex that's right next to the Noel's grocery market, adding laundry facilities to each of those units was an ARPA project that's already been completed and it came in under budget.

**Kurtis**

So that's good news.

**Andrea**

That is good.

**Kurtis**

We also have the Salem housing development that has currently, that broke ground last month, I believe. So they're doing all the infrastructure of water, sewer, electrical, before the next phase takes place, which is the actual bidding of the units. So that will have, I believe, 38 or 39 housing units in Salem, and an office space and a maintenance shed.

**Kurtis**

So that is already out to bid that project, but that was a significant portion of our ARPA funding. But the administration-two building, which used to be the old clinic, needed a huge remodel. A half of that building was still.

**Andrea**

Well it was clinic stuff, right?

**Kurtis**

Yeah, it was left open for when the clinic moved over ten years ago. Like where the dental offices were still looked like a dental office.

**Andrea**

Right.

**Kurtis**

So that building has been remodeled for additional office space for the administration. And that project is done. We're actively working with the City of Siletz on a wastewater and water agreement. So the agreements are done. That's been a project that's been underway for, I don't know, probably well over ten years, and we'll probably do some more announcements on that.

**Kurtis**

I have Lisa, provide an update on the wastewater projects that we're doing.

**Andrea**

Okay.

**Kurtis**

But, but that's huge. And the Portland area office was also purchasing the new building in Portland, was an ARPA project. And that, that building is going to be under construction for remodel here in the next couple of months. So we need to add a new kitchen and a new reception area and make sure that that building is more safe than the previous one.

**Kurtis**

So that's an ARPA project that's moving along fairly well.

**Andrea**

And that's the Portland area office, correct? Yep. Okay. I was making sure I, I know what we're talking about.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, we call it the mod line building.

**Andrea**

Okay.

**Kurtis**

So its a three story building, the office currently occupies the top floor.

**Andrea**

The suite.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. So it's, it's nice, and it's definitely more secure and in a better area than the previous office off of Stark.

**Andrea**

Right. Safety was a big a big-big deal at the old area office.

**Kurtis**

Yes.

**Andrea**

Yeah. so I guess I have just one final question for you that I forgot to put on my list of questions I was going to ask you, but what is your favorite tribal annual event or activity that we have?

**Kurtis**

I think my favorite activity has to be Run to the Rogue

**Andrea**

Run to the Rogue?

**Kurtis**

Yeah, I've gone a couple of times, mostly when I was working in the self-sufficiency program, but, we tried taking a whole bunch of our clients to be able to experience run of the road. And since COVID, we haven't been able to have it. And then the last two years we've had to cancel it because of fires and smoking area wildfires.

**Andrea**

Yeah, wildfires. But, it was moved to May I believe, right? So that way we can hopefully avoid wildfire season.

**Kurtis**

Yeah. So we've moved it. I believe it's the end of May into the first week in June. So we do look forward to Run to the Rogue. Planning is already taking place. But hopefully I can get some miles in this year. I just went down to The Mill, earlier this week and I was just thinking of different miles that I would want to sort of pick up.

**Andrea**

Little stretches that you want to sign up for.

**Kurtis**

Yeah, definitely all the downhill ones.

**Andrea**

So downhill with the wind at your back.

**Kurtis**

Yes. And right on the water. Yes. But yeah, I think all of us are looking forward to having our Run to the Rogue back.

**Andrea**

Good. Well, I think that wraps up our podcast today. Thank you Kurtis, for coming on in and just and starting the ball, rolling on this and getting us going. So we can start, you know, this new adventure.

**Kurtis**

Well, thank you. I appreciate you advocating for this project. And hopefully the tribal members, the membership listens to it and provides feedback. So we'll probably provide some information on where to find the podcast in the newsletters and on our Facebook page. But yeah, we look forward to having people's feedback and providing more updates and getting the information out to the membership.

**Andrea**

Yeah, we want the engagement. We want them to know that we care and we want to know what's important to them or what they want to know about.

**Kurtis**

Exactly! We don't want to waste anybody's time. We want to be able to provide the information that people want and need.

**Andrea**

All right. Thank you so much. Have a great day.

**Kurtis**

You too, thank you. Bye.