

Sisters Library honors 'First Americans'

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The Friends of the Sisters Library (FOSL) have an exhibit titled "First Americans" in the community room, computer room, and lobby display cases from now through October. The show is running in conjunction with the "Curtis Fever" events (see related story on page 7) planned throughout Central Oregon this fall.

FOSL board members and members of the community have loaned items and artwork depicting the early 20th century life of Native Americans. Framed lithographs by well-known Sisters artist Ray Eyerly (see related story on page 3) will be available for purchase, with the proceeds going to Sisters Kiwanis for civic projects, college scholarships for local students, and career-advancement scholarships.

Prior to his death in 1980, Eyerly had given all the lithographs of his original paintings to Jim and Carrie Cheatham, then-owners of The Gallery Restaurant, where Eyerly had displayed his original artwork since 1963.

Following Eyerly's death, his three children took possession of the originals then in The Gallery as well as most of the lithographs. Cheatham retained the open packages of unsold lithographs, which

he kept for over 30 years in dark, temperature-controlled storage so they are currently in pristine condition. Last winter, Cheatham donated all of the remaining 250 lithographs to Sisters Kiwanis in support of their fundraising efforts.

At the First Americans exhibit there will be six Eyerly lithographs, framed by Sisters Gallery and Frame Shop, available for purchase. The largest of these is a full-color image of Chief Clarence Burke, which measures 30 by 42 inches including frame.

Burke (July 4, 1891-July 2, 1987) was described as a broad-shouldered man, taller than most others. He was the chief of the Umatilla tribes. He reportedly spoke only his native language, Shahaptian, the ancestral language of the Columbia Basin tribes.

His ancestors had been given the "Friendship Medal" by Lewis and Clark when they traveled through the region – a symbol of peace and cooperation with the U.S. government, and the acknowledged badge of leadership among the tribes. That medal was later stolen from Burke and never recovered.

For years, Burke was an icon at the Pendleton Roundup. He was known as the "most photographed Indian in the West." Eyerly's painting portrays him in his complete chief's dress,

including his full headdress of eagle feathers. The portrait was originally painted in 1971.

Besides the six lithographs being exhibited, any of the other unframed Eyerly prints held by Kiwanis are also available for purchase. Those bought during the First Americans exhibit will be framed by Sisters Gallery for 15 percent off the cost of the frame and matte. Order forms will be collected over the six weeks of the show and will be available for pickup at the conclusion of the exhibit at Sisters Gallery.

Also on display will be a print of the original photogravure by Edward Curtis of his "Camp Among the Spokan" (his spelling), which was made in 1910. It shows tents erected in a clearing by members of the Spokan tribe. This is being loaned by Kit Stafford, who is also providing a peyote ceremonial bag, a beaded belt with silver buckle, and a turtle rattle with feathers.

Local Sisters artist Dyrk Godby (see related story, page 19) has provided two leather pieces on which he has created artwork using a wood-burning tool and a pencil drawing showcasing the intricacy of his work. There will be other artwork and artifacts depicting ordinary life among the First Americans at the beginning of the 20th century.



PHOTO BY CURTISS ABBOTT

Chief Clarence Burke, by Ray Eyerly.

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