

Students celebrate First Peoples

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

Sisters school children celebrated and learned about Oregon's First Peoples in Clay Warburton and Katie Parsons' classes last Wednesday. The 28th celebration held at Sisters Elementary School was an opportunity for students to showcase to their parents and friends what they had learned about native populations.

Students gathered on the stage in the SES Commons while their parents and family friends looked on. Several had speaking parts and shared many facts about Oregon's Native Americans.

"Evidence found right here in Oregon puts Native Americans on this continent more than 14,000 years ago, but many historians agree that people began arriving thousands of years before that," one of the speakers began.

Students discussed how hunters were believed to have followed herds of animals over a land bridge between present-day Russia and Alaska, known as Beringia.

"As people continued to migrate across this continent, they left behind many of the diseases and animals that were

a part of their lives," another student continued.

According to the presentation, estimates put the population of the Native American people in the United States and Canada around 14 million just prior to contact with Europeans and Africans. More than 296 languages were spoken in North America.

In Oregon alone, there were over 100 different bands and tribes speaking more than 21 languages.

By 1840, after contact with Europeans, the number of native people dropped to just 2 million and another 40 years later the number was only 250,000. The drastic decline in the population was caused largely by disease brought by colonists and explorers.

Students demonstrated the shrinking population using

their class as an example population, laying on the floor until only two students remained standing.

"I learned a lot; I had no idea how many languages there were," said Christy Rungay, a guest at the event. "I'm surprised how few tribes are remaining."

Today, nine tribes recognized by the federal government are in Oregon. Students had a chance to stand up and share if they had Native American heritage by talking about their families' connection to different tribes.

In addition to the class simulation, three songs were sung by all students, and they demonstrated the stick game.

"I liked watching the students play the stick game," said Amanda Clark, who has a student in the class. "Finn



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Students tried foods that would have been familiar to native peoples.

really likes to play."

Students also made items to trade with other students in a way to showcase how native people may have traded with other tribes. Warburton's class made rocks painted with Native American symbols and Parsons' class made sand paintings also adorned with symbols and hieroglyphics.

At the end of the

presentation students invited their guests to join them on mats on the floor and celebrate Oregon's First People feast including nuts, jerky, salmon, dried fruit and cornbread.

"I enjoy having the families come and enjoy time with their kids," said Parsons. "It's fun to watch them all sit on the floor and crack nuts together and just talk."

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