

Springfield joins in the spirit of Chautauqua



Courtesy photo
The Springfield Historical Commission presents "Sarah Winnemucca — The Woman Chief," featuring Vanessa Brown.

By Sheila Landry

Of the Emerald

Just as the word Chautauqua (pronounced sha-taw-qua) seems to slide gently over one's lips like many words whose roots are based in the language of Native American culture, its meaning also has soothing connotations for those searching for educational enrichment beyond the solid walls of institutions.

The first Chautauqua, which means a gathering for educational purposes presented in an entertaining format; was held in 1874 in New York on the shores of Lake Chautauqua. It grew in popularity and gatherings soon spread across the United States, reaching a peak in 1920 when it is estimated that one out of every three Americans attended a Chautauqua.

Oregon's Committee for the Humanities is offering people an opportunity to enjoy education in the same fashion as our ancestors by presenting the fifth annual Oregon Chautauqua during August and September.

Participants can tour the backroads and highways of Oregon through 30 towns across the state. The towns will offer free lectures and a variety of entertainment, including exhibits, dramatic performances and puppet shows.

Local residents will not have to travel far this year to take part in the program, as the Springfield Historical Commission is sponsoring a presentation of "Sarah Winnemucca — The Woman Chief" in conjunction with Willamalane Parks and Recreation.

Due to her courageous effort to maintain brotherhood between her people and whites, Winnemucca is one of the only woman known to be named an Indian chief. The Paiute Indian woman, who lived 100 years ago, spoke five languages and was the first Native American to write a book (an auto-biography) in English.

Springfield playwright Dorothy Velasco adapted for stage presentation the sad story of Winnemucca and the plight of the Indian

culture's struggle with white society. Velasco wrote the script with the consultation of University English Professor Barre Toelken, a noted folklorist, and emeritus history Professor Edwin Bingham.

Bingham also is the narrator of the presentation and will play several small roles during the performance. He is joined by Native Americans Vanessa Brown, who plays Winnemucca, and Michael John Matthews, who accompanies Brown on traditional drums and also plays a number of short roles.

Bingham says that although he is somewhat intimidated about going on stage due to his lack of theatrical experience, he feels his teaching background enables him to deal with the tension of live performance.

"Essentially, teaching is performance," Bingham says. "I'm always nervous before lectures, but you learn to develop a healthy tension in which you can be nervous, yet appear to be relaxed."

Velasco says she's written several scripts and taught playwriting courses in many places, including the University, since she received her master's degree in playwriting from the University of Southern California. But she says recounting Winnemucca's story has been one of her most difficult endeavors due to the tragic sadness of the woman's life.

"It's difficult trying to get a little humor into such a sad story so that the audience can leave with at least a note of hope at the end," Velasco says. "To this day, Sarah's tribe is still fighting for water rights on their homeland in Nevada."

In an effort to balance tragedy with gaiety, Velasco says she included three dances during the 90-minute presentation, beginning with Brown performing a "Fancy Dance," followed by a "Traditional Dance" and ending with a rousing "Round Dance" in which the audience joins Brown in a circle after the performance.

The free presentation is set for Aug. 23 at 8 p.m. in the Willamalane Senior Adult Center.

County fair offers variety of entertainment

A variety of entertainment, a diverse array of exhibits and numerous carnival rides are scheduled for the annual Lane County Fair, beginning today and running through Sunday.

Daily musical performances at the fair begin with Loretta Lynn today, and are followed respectively by The Charlie Daniels Band, Janie Fricke, Air Supply and Arlo Guthrie.

The last day of the fair will feature the state competition for the nationwide Wrangler Country Showdown, which features aspiring country musicians. Forty regional winners from across the

country will meet in the national finals at the Grand Ole Opry, Nashville, Tenn., in November.

Fairgoers also can view any of the hundreds of exhibits that will be on display. Categories include anything from angora goats to wine and art.

Each day of the fair will feature special discounts on carnival rides and admission.

Tuesday is 7-Up day, where children under 18 are admitted free if they bring two 7-UP cans between 10 a.m. and 5

p.m. Carnival ride prices also will be reduced for all ages during that time period.

Senior Citizen Day is Wednesday, and all those over 65 will be admitted free between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Thursday is Pepsi Day, where children under 18 are admitted free with two Pepsi cans during the same hours, and reduced prices for carnival rides are available for all ages during that time period.

Fairgoers will be able to buy a special \$10-ticket for carnival rides on Sunday that will entitle them to unlimited rides between noon and 9 p.m.

Daily admission to the fair is \$3.50 for those 16 and older and \$2.50 for children ages 10 through 15. Kids under 10 will be admitted for free. Season tickets are \$8.50 for those over 16 and \$5.50 for children ages 10 through 15.

Tickets for the daily musical performances are \$1. However, Steve McCulloch, fair manager, says tickets for Air Supply and The Charlie Daniels Band sold out in July. Daily concerts will be at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Fairgoers can ride free shuttles from the downtown Lane Transit Station and the River Road station.

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