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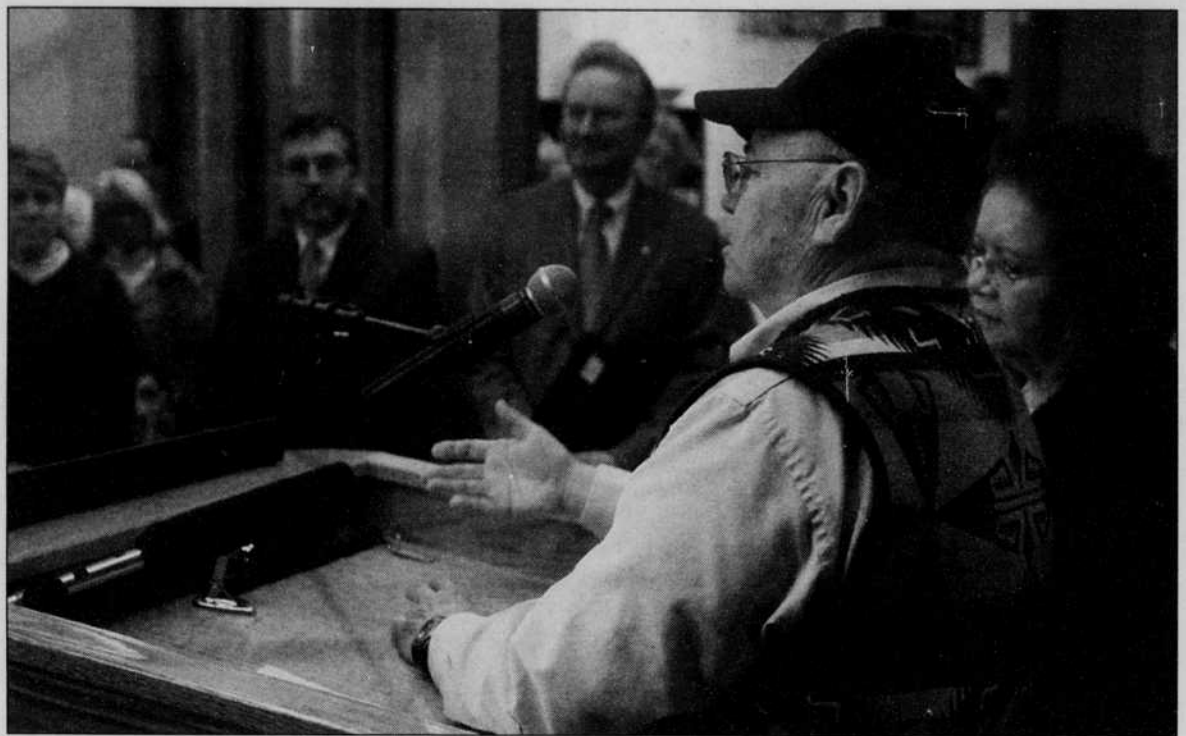
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Dwight Souers of the Lakota tribe offers a blessing before the opening of the Museum of Natural and Cultural History.

## History: Exhibit accents indigenous cultures

Continued from page 1

President Dave Frohnmayer and a ribbon cutting ceremony by two Moss Street preschoolers.

Museum Director Mel Aikens said Knight's predecessor may not be the only one who hasn't received due credit. Aikens notes that while the discipline of natural science is often considered to be a Western construct, American Indians have had an extremely intimate knowledge of the environment for centuries.

"We're not the only ones who invented it," he said. "In order to live off the land, you need to have an extensive knowledge of it. ... They come to know effectively everything about their natural settings."

On Friday, about a hundred museum patrons, young and old, streamed into the museum. Moss Street preschoolers, though unable to read, were among the most enthusiastic and excited patrons.

Aikens, also a University professor emeritus of anthropology, said the museum's content is targeted at families.

"We've tried to create displays that both children and parents can enjoy," he said. "We would like to have a museum that Native American parents can send their children to learn about their history."

The brand new exhibit is an attempt to provide a comprehensive look at Oregon's natural and cultural history, with a special emphasis on Oregon's indigenous cultures. The exhibit begins with the creation of Oregon 46 billion years ago.

"If you go back far enough, the land we're standing on isn't even here," Aikens said.

The rest of the exhibit is divided up into four parts, each representing one of Oregon's distinct geographic regions and the American Indian cultures that thrived within them.

"We tell the story of human history and how different people coped with the landscape," Aikens said.

Each of the four regions — the Great Basin, the Columbia Plateau, the Coast and the Western Valleys — has a diorama that represents its respective natural and cultural assets. Oregon artist Don Prechtel created the murals for the dioramas. Aikens said Prechtel worked to ensure that every painstaking detail of the natural setting and of the people portrayed was accurate.

One of the museum's highlights is a replica of a 500-year-old cedar plank house in the Pacific Coast diorama. Don Day, a graduate student and member of the Confederate Tribes of the Grand Ronde, said he constructed the house by attempting to use the techniques one would have used a half millennium ago. For instance, Day used an ancient wood-splitting technique that involves wedging pieces of wood into logs and pounding them with a giant mallet fashioned from a tree trunk.

Other highlights include an authentic fishing net and a Paiute wickiup, a dome-shaped structure that served as a shelter.

The museum also features a [moriahbalingit@dailyemerald.com](mailto:moriahbalingit@dailyemerald.com)

science workshop, called "Science at the Core," where patrons can handle volcanic rocks and participate in a range of other hands-on activities.

"It's basically like a classroom more than anything," Aikens said. "We'll be able to teach kids how the science is done."

Aikens called the response to the museum's opening "beautiful." He was especially excited about the number of young people who came to the opening, saying the museum provides a unique, multi-dimensional learning experience.

"(Schoolchildren) have the opportunity to study these multi-layered kinds of displays from which you can draw a variety of information," he said.

Community member Sabin Lamson, who was on hand for Friday's grand opening, could barely contain his excitement over the exhibits.

"I'm fascinated with the anthropology and the geology of Oregon," he said. "I wish this museum was eight times bigger."

Lamson, who has traveled extensively around Oregon, said the exhibits provided him with some new insight into the sights he'd seen.

"I've been traveling around Oregon for years and years and looking at things," he said. "This puts together a whole number of things I've seen out in the landscape but never connected."

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