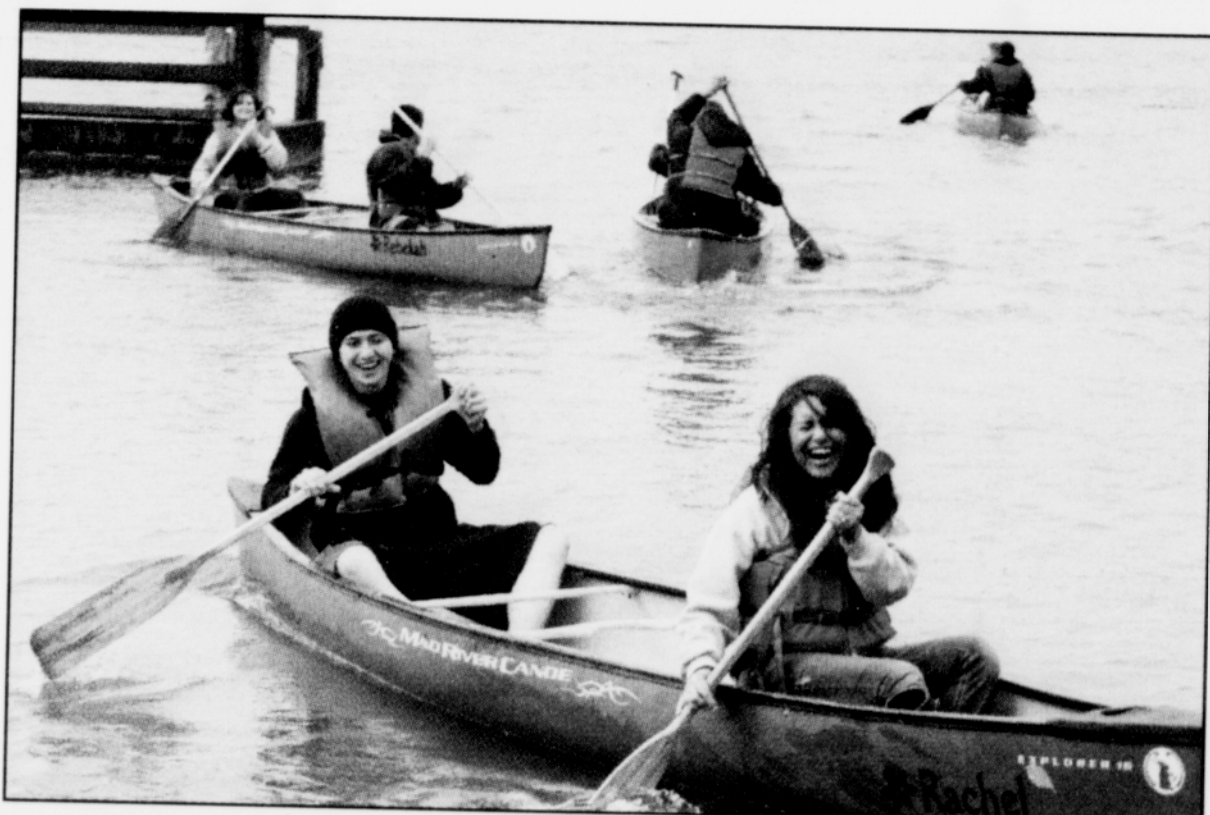




First-time canoers (left) maneuver on the lake. During a breakout session (right), youth practice teamwork by putting a puzzle together.

Seth Benedict, George Nagel and Jon Benedict (below left) take a break from the activities. Leah Suitter takes notes (below right) as Keaston Johns and Carolina Simmons express their interest in an NCAI youth program.

Photo by Natasha Kavanaugh

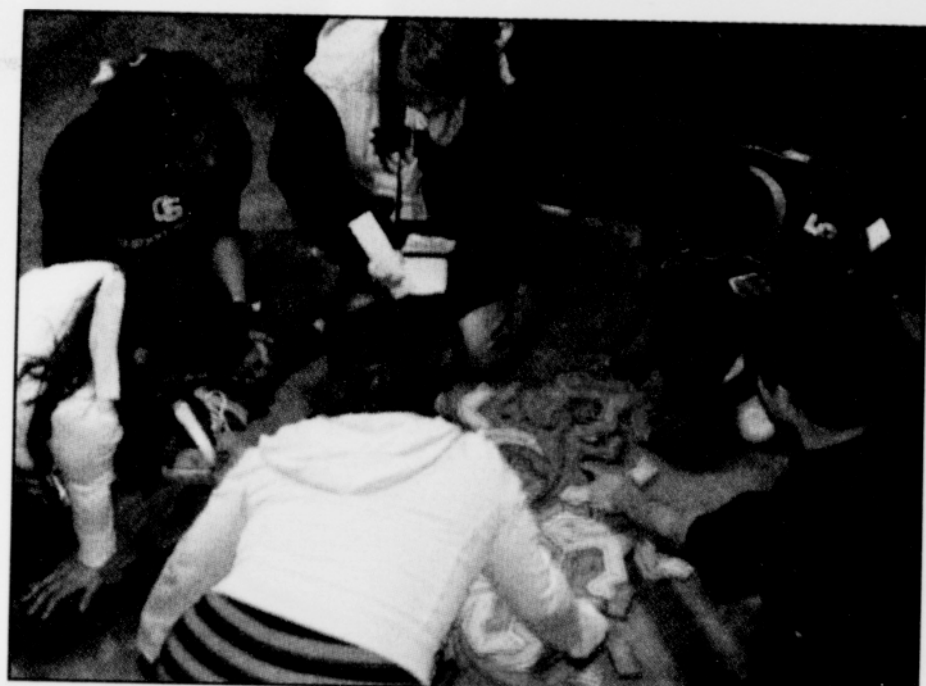


Photo by Leah Suitter

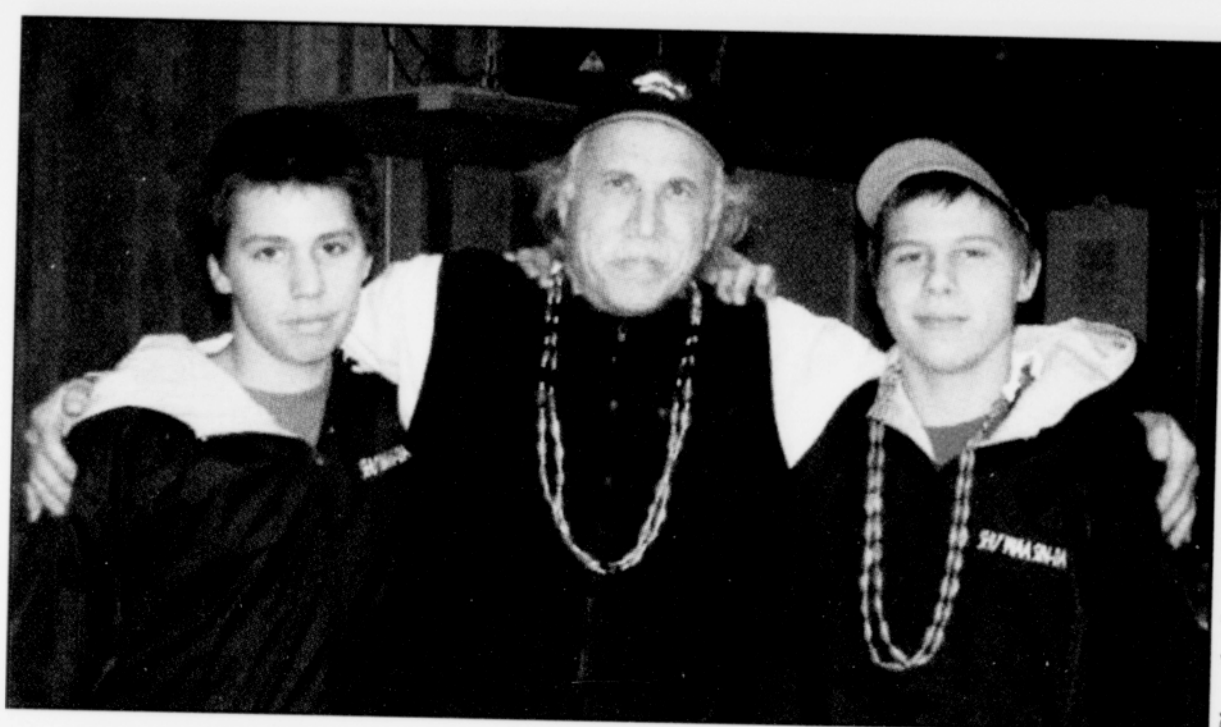


Photo by Leah Suitter

Angie Butler (below) discusses her higher education experiences.

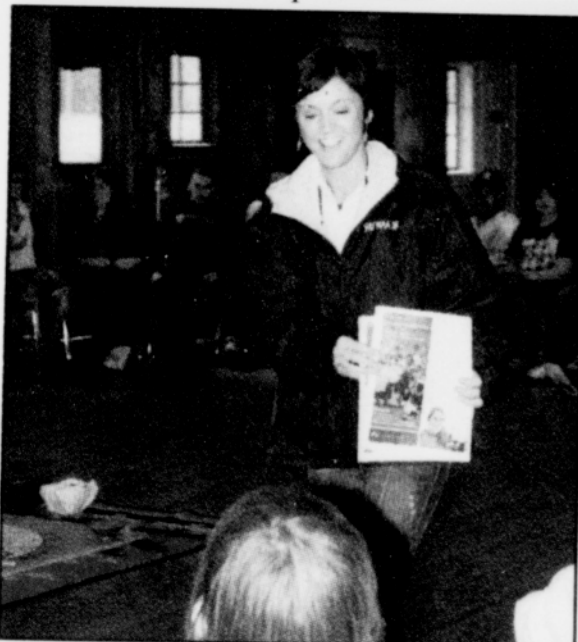


Photo by Natasha Kavanaugh



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Youth Come Together at Annual Conference, Where Respect is Key

West Coast Boyz set the tone for gathering that encourages youth to connect and reconnect

By Natasha Kavanaugh

The annual Siletz Tribal Youth Conference was held Nov. 7-8 at the B'Nai B'Rith Summer Camp near Devils Lake in Lincoln City.

Youth and many supportive adult mentors gathered for an opportunity to forge new relationships and maintain established ones in a healthy and respectful manner.

"I went to the conference because I wanted to learn more about my culture, about respect," said Ron Butler Jr.

Many sessions were offered, such as Tribal culture/history, personal development, physical/mental/emotional self-

care, managing finances, storytelling and other cultural practices.

Jenifer Metcalf found a new memory at this conference to always carry with her.

"I heard a drum and the song was so powerful I thought Reggie and Lee had come to do an honor song. When I went to the drum they weren't there. Instead it was our youth around this drum," she said. "As 'Brother' led these young men in a song, it touched my soul. What an amazing gift and legacy Lee and Reg have going on. I watched these young men sing and as each one did a solo, my eyes filled with tears and Lil Ron sang with the most beautiful voice."

So much was offered at the conference that it proved difficult for the youth to narrow it down to the most important to them. Some enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and others got a surprise of meeting family members for the first time.

"I went last year and it was fun. I liked drumming and playing basketball," said Bo Johnson.

"Drumming and the canoe races were fun," said Ron.

An open mind can be a valuable asset to youth, more specifically to Paul Simmons.

"Umm ... the most important thing I learned was that trying new things or looking at something from someone

else's point of view can be a good thing," he said.

Jenifer took this opportunity to continue her lifelong efforts to work with youth.

"It was an honor to be a part of it," she shared. "All the kids were inviting and respectful. It fit the nature of the conference since it was about respect."

Several youth and mentors expressed their appreciation and gratitude to all those who put this conference together and to the West Coast Boyz for setting the tone and all the songs.

"Everyone who participated ... you guys rock!" said Jenifer.



Photo by Leah Suitter

The West Coast Boyz drummed and sang throughout the conference in a great demonstration of youth leadership.



Photo by Natasha Kavanaugh

Conference participants take part in a round dance as part of the activities. The West Coast Boyz are in the middle of the circle, singing and playing hand drums.