

Tribes Celebrate Sovereignty, Share Information and Culture at Capitol

Jay Minthorn Honored for Years of Service to Commission on Indian Services, Tribes

By Diane Rodriguez

The voice rang out clear and strong – unmistakable to some, new to others. Chief Delvis Heath from Warm Springs sang part of the invocation without using the microphone – and hearing him was no problem in the rotunda as Tribes from across Oregon celebrated Tribal Government Day at the State Capitol on May 14.

This followed a day of meetings between Tribal representatives and state agency heads and kicked off American Indian Week in Oregon on May 15-21.

On Tribal Government Day, all nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon set up information tables in front of the Senate chambers and shared Tribal history and Tribal products with those in attendance.

All were subject to the haunting sounds of a flute played by Don Gentry, vice chair of the Klamath Tribe, who played just prior to the ceremony.

A drum group led by Eugene Austin Greene from Warm Springs opened the ceremony by playing during the flag procession, which included members from each Tribe. Ed Ben carried the Siletz Tribal flag.

Following Heath's stirring invocation, the crowd was treated to a song from Jan Michael Looking Wolf, the 2009 NAMMY Artist of the Year.

Siletz Tribal Chairman Delores Pigsley and Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy welcomed the crowd.

"Thank you for coming to learn about

the state and its relationship with Tribes in Oregon," said Kennedy.

"I'd like to remind people that this is the home of Chemawa Indian School, where many of our parents and grandparents got their education and then settled in the area and raised their families," said Pigsley.

She went on to thank her "very good friend, Vic Atiyeh," who helped get "a lot of support in the day when we weren't Tribes."

"I was honestly and emotionally pleased when I heard the first drumbeat in the State Capitol," said Atiyeh, who was governor when the first Commission on Indian Services was established in 1975 and was operated out of the executive branch of government. It's now known as the Legislative Commission on Indian Services (LCIS).

Siletz Tribal member Art Bensell was one of several people on this first commission; 87 representatives from Oregon Tribes have served on it since. Tribal Council member Jessie Davis currently is on the commission, which is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year.

"This is such a warm time here in the state of Oregon, in the Capitol that represents all in the state of Oregon," said Sue Shaffer, chair of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians. Atiyeh, she said, "was the first person who started the ball rolling on developing the Commission on Indian Services."

Under the leadership of Karen Quigley, executive director, the commission "has moved in the direction to really put that



Photos by Diane Rodriguez

Siletz Tribal Chairman Delores Pigsley, Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy and Secretary of State Kate Brown share a few words prior to the ceremony.

department where it needs to be in the minds of Oregon people," Shaffer said.

Secretary of State Kate Brown read a proclamation from Gov. Ted Kulongoski proclaiming Oregon Indian Week and then introduced Umatilla Tribal Elder Jay Minthorn, a member of LCIS since 1996.

Brown described Minthorn's 26 years of service on the Umatilla Tribe's board of trustees, 30 years on the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission, 30 years as a gill-net fisherman, a rodeo competitor and wild horse racer, plus his marriage to his wife, Geri, who passed in 2009.

"We appreciate your calm steady hand on the Commission on Indian Services. To me, you have served since time immemorial," said Brown. "We're really going to miss your presence."

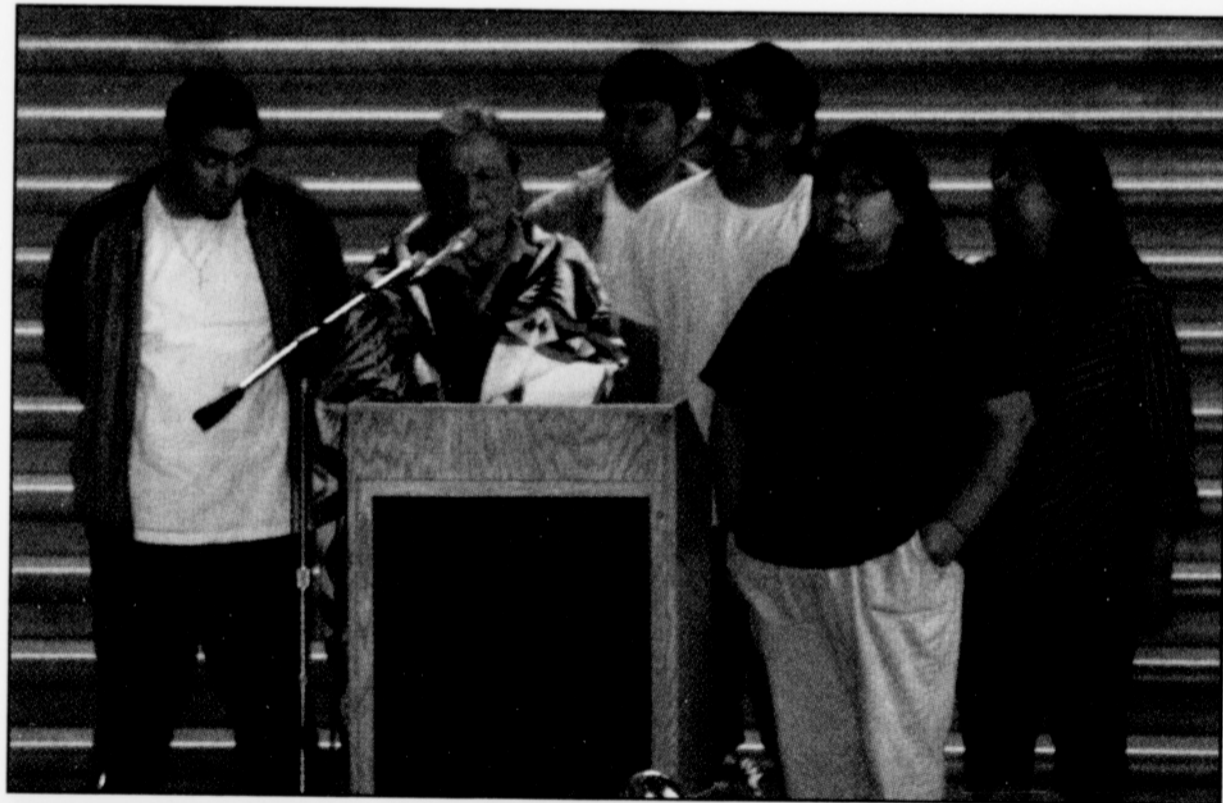
Minthorn then expressed his thanks to those present.

"I've had a hard year and you've eased my heart today. It takes a family to hold each other together," he said. "I'm proud to have worked for the Tribes. All of you folks are important. All of you are what make this a success."

The ceremony concluded with a round dance in Minthorn's honor.



Jay Minthorn (Umatilla) and Delvis Heath (Warm Springs) take in the ceremony in the rotunda during Tribal Government Day at the State Capitol.



The family of Jay Minthorn gathers near as he thanks the crowd for the many accolades and honors he's received in his years of service to Indian Country.



Leonda M. Villegas – 1951-2010

Leonda M. Villegas, 58, of Gervais, Ore., died of a long-term illness May 3, 2010, at the Hopewell Hospice House in Portland, Ore.

She was born Dec. 23, 1951, to Calvin and Ella Simmons in Toledo, Ore. She graduated from Siletz High School.

She worked at Chemawa Indian School for more than two decades. She loved beading, cooking and surfing the Internet. She was a beloved wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and friend to many.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Calvin and Ella Simmons.

She is survived by her husband, Roberto Villegas, of Gervais; her children, Ulysses Simmons of Salem, Ore., Luella Gonzales of Salem, Yolanda Vera-Simmons of Aloha, Ore., Timothy Villegas of Gervais, Martha Villegas of Salem and Jonathan Villegas of Gervais; siblings, Elouise Case, Nancy Simmons, Darwin Simmons, Donald Simmons Sr., Reginald Butler and Ronald Butler, all

of Siletz, Ore., Calvin Simmons Jr. of Clatskanie, Ore., and Delmer Butler of Reedsport, Ore.; 14 grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

A funeral service was held May 5 at the Siletz Tribal Community Center in Siletz, with the final ceremony following at Paul Washington Cemetery. A reception followed at the Tribal center.

Affordable Burial and Cremation in Newport handled the arrangements.