

OIEA Focuses on Decolonizing Education at Annual Conference

By Tiffany Wisdom, Teacher-Nez Perce Reservation (Siletz/Grand Ronde/Cherokee)

The 35th Annual Oregon Indian Education Association Conference – Decolonizing Indian Education – was held June 21-23 at the University of Oregon (UO) in Eugene, Ore.

Mary Jane Oatman Wak Wak (Nez Perce/Nimiipuu), NIEA president-elect and Idaho Department of Education Indian Education coordinator, passionately spoke as a keynote on “Manifesting our own destiny: education empowerment to healing.”

Mary Jane shared her experience of the public school system and the discrimination to Native students in her math class. In her entire education, from public school to college, there was always a barrier.

“It was the love of my family that allowed me to overcome the barriers,” said Mary Jane. Her advice on changing the racism in the education system for the educators in attendance was “to question the legitimacy of decolonization.”

Mary Jane told a story of huckleberry picking as a child. She said that we fill our baskets with knowledge huckleberries and we might drop some of them. Even though in our educational setting we get tired, she encouraged us to “pick ourselves up and keep picking.”

This story truly touched my heart and I can share her experience with my students to uplift them and to heal from the decolonization in our schools.

Several presenters were at the conference, including ChiXapkaid/Dr. Michael Pavel (Skokomish, professor at UO education studies), Wendall Jim (Warm Springs Tribal Council), Dr. Cornel Pewewardy (Comanche and Kiowa, Portland State University director and associate professor of Native American studies), Dr. Sandy Grande (Quechua, Connecticut College associate professor of education and chair of Education Department), Tyson Oreiro (Lummi, Northwest Indian College student), and UO College of Education and Sapsik’wala Program students (<http://education.uoregon.edu/field.htm?id=71>).

The Siletz Feather Dancers performed at the banquet and auction. The auction benefits are used for OIEA scholarships. Check the OIEA website – www.oiea.org/ – for 2011 conference information.

Thank you to Auntie Shirley Walker; Cristian, Ashliegh and Angela Ramirez; Tays Salazar; Sam Lynch; Marlene Stuart; and Sheryl Steinruck for dancing for the Sapsik’wala Native American master’s degree program students from across Indian Country and educators from the Northwest.



Courtesy photo by Elliot Bryant (Navajo/UO Sapsik’wala Project student)

Siletz Feather Dancers at the OIEA conference include (l to r) Marlene Stuart, Tiffany Wisdom, Sam Lynch (UO student – human physiology/pharmacy), Tays Salazar, Ashliegh Ramirez (Jr. Miss Siletz Princess), Cristian Ramirez, Shirley Walker (Siletz Tribal whipwoman), Sheryl Steinruck (UO student – master’s in linguistics) and Angela Ramirez

OIEA Names Blair Elder of the Year

Virgene Blair (Siletz) carries her passionate commitment to families of American Indian/Alaskan Native K-12 students, school personnel and beyond.

She works under the auspices of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz and its Elders Work Experience program.

Blair consults parents/guardians and teachers to develop tutoring plans for the students she tutors. She takes a personal interest in their academic success and does what she can to help them learn about their culture. Because of her tireless efforts, our student count had a net increase.

She offers to help students enroll Tribally and always, always, always does everything in her power for students to take pride in who they are. She also makes a special gift for each tutoring student.

Education Highlights



James Mays IV – Portland Community College

The 477 Self-Sufficiency Program is pleased to announce that Siletz Tribal member James Mays IV has earned his GED from Portland Community College.

The entire 477 Self-Sufficiency Program as well as the Portland Area Office staff would like to congratulate James on all of his hard work and determination.

“You’re never too old to get your GED and achieve your goal,” said James. “Even though it may not seem worth it at the time, it is in the long run and it feels great!”

James is pictured above after he received his Pendleton blanket from Anna Renville, his Tribal services specialist in the Portland Area Office.



Jade Fernandez

With love from Lola, Mom and Dante

We would like to congratulate Jade Fernandez for graduating and receiving her high school diploma and for representing the State of Oregon in a high school cooking competition held in Kansas City, Mo., last month. She placed 14th out of 47 competitors in the baking category of the competition and we’re all so proud of her.

Jade is the daughter of Tribal member Michelene Washington and the granddaughter of Tribal Elder Consuelo Fernandez.

Jade plans to attend Portland State University next year and we wish her all the best in her future endeavors. We love you, Jade! Keep up the good work!



Jennifer Ben Sacramento State U.

With much pride, we would like to mention that Jennifer Ben graduated from Sacramento State University with honors on May 25, 2010. She majored in art and received her bachelor’s degree.

Jennifer worked very hard to complete all required courses in four years and her parents are very proud of her accomplishments. Good job, Jennifer!

Congratulations to Daphne Simmons for making the Honor Roll for spring term at Linn-Benton Community College with a GPA of 3.75.