

Wilkinson draws crowd to discussion of *The People Are Dancing Again*

More than 50 people listen to reading about Tribe's villages, war, struggle, heartbreak and triumph

By Diane Rodriguez

"Lupton and his party fired a volley into the crowded encampment, following up the sudden and totally unexpected attack by a close encounter with knives, revolvers and whatever weapon they were possessed of ... These facts are matters of evidence, as are the killing of several squaws, one or more old decrepit men and a number, probably small, of children."

As Charles Wilkinson read this passage about the massacre of Table Rock Indians at Little Butte Creek in 1855, from his book of Siletz Tribal history, *The People Are Dancing Again*, a collective gasp rose from the more than 50 people in the audience.

They were attending his presentation on March 5, which was part of the Nye Beach Writers Series. Wilkinson is one of more than 300 authors who have presented their works in this series.

Wilkinson began his presentation as he did the book, with a description of a village and life as it was for the 50,000 indigenous individuals who lived on the coast and in the inland valleys prior to contact with settlers.

He described the Athapascan word "duh-neh, which means 'the people of the place' and also encompasses 'the blood line.' It is 'the place where your family has always been buried.'"

In describing the white man's failure to understand how strong Native people's ties were to their village, he read:

"Duh-neh: This is the one place where a person is from, where all the people all the way back are from, where the ancestors are buried. This is the only place, the heart place. There can be no other place."

As Wilkinson continued his presentation, he read another section in the book about Tye John (Tecumtum, Shasta), who echoed this sentiment about the land in May 1856 when he took a stand in addressing Colonel Robert Buchanan just before the Battle of Big Bend:

"You are a great chief. So am I. This is my country; I was in it when those trees were very small, not higher than my head. My heart is sick with fighting, but I want to live in my country. If the white people are willing, I will go back to the Deer creek and live among them as I used to do. They can visit my camp, and I will visit theirs; but I will not lay down my arms and go with you on the reserve. I will fight. Good-by."

The Battle of Big Bend, which turned out to be the last battle of the Rogue River War, commenced shortly after this speech. The war ended on July 2 when



Photos by Diane Rodriguez

As Charles Wilkinson (above photo, second from left) makes final preparations for his presentation, Siletz Tribal Council members Bud Lane, Robert Kentta and Delores Pigsley enjoy a discussion. They were later joined at the event by council member Tina Retasket and Tribal members David Hatch and Arthur Fisher. After his presentation, Wilkinson signed books for members of the audience (below).



Tye John became the last person to hand over his rifle.

Wilkinson continued to relate details of the removal of people to the Coast (Siletz Reservation), how portions of the reservation were illegally taken by the U.S. government, how the Tribe endured

termination and how it started its comeback in the 1970s with the fight to be restored.

He concluded his presentation on a positive note by citing two items of great significance to Tribal members today.

Wilkinson first mentioned Run to the Rogue, a 234-mile relay from the city

of Siletz to Oak Flat, near Agness, Ore., where the Illinois and Rogue rivers meet:

"The route - trail then, highway now - traces in reverse the infamous long march that many of the ancestors made in 1856. Returning by the same route can help salvage the memories of the torment of the march and also assure the Coast, the forests and the rivers that the Siletz have survived and remain loyal to their ancestral place. The destination is Oak Flat, the meeting ground where Tye John refused Colonel Buchanan's order to surrender and move north and instead chose to fight the final conflict at Big Bend. Downriver is the myrtle grove where the 1855 treaty, never ratified and never honored except by the tribes, was finally signed on September 8. So the Siletz people hold Run to the Rogue each year to remember - and never to forget - the battles, the treaties, the marches, the ancestors, and the land."

The second is Nee Dosh, "a World Renewal Dance, a ceremony practiced by tribes on the Oregon Coast and northern California." It takes place in the Tribe's dance house that opened in 1996.

On the third night of each Nee Dosh, the most experienced dancers participate and wear regalia that grows ever more elaborate during each round of dancing that lasts all night.

In the book, Wilkinson describes the dance in some detail. Near the end of the description, he included a short paragraph of profound meaning:

"Late in the third round, a woman seated next to me whispered, 'See those shadows on the back wall? Those are the ancestors, dancing with the people here tonight.'"

At the end of the last dance, he writes, "The lead singer said a final blessing, *Huu-chan xuu naa-xuth-xat-le*, 'As you depart, may the blessings be with you.'"

And thus did Wilkinson end his presentation.

The People Are Dancing Again: The History of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon

Book events for Charles Wilkinson and members of the Siletz Tribal Council

Open to the Public

Organization	Date	Location
University of Wyoming	April 14	Laramie, Wyo.
Michigan State University	April 18	Michigan
UCLA	TBA	California
National Museum of the American Indian	TBA	Washington, D.C.
University of Oregon	TBA	Eugene, Ore.

News from the Dental Clinic

Please contact the Siletz Community Dental Clinic if you experience dental pain or a dental emergency. The staff will do everything possible to see you as soon as reasonably possible.

Because of high volume, check-in time is Monday-Thursday from 8:30-9 a.m. and Friday from 10-10:30 a.m. Afternoon check-in time is Monday-Friday from 1-1:30 p.m.