



PHOTO: PHIL CARRASCO

ACTIVISTS AND YOUTH PUSH FOR SPRINGFIELD TO RECOGNIZE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY

Across most of the country, Oct. 10 is Columbus Day — celebrating Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America. But in Eugene and some other cities, including Seattle and Berkeley, we now celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day.

There is currently a push for Springfield to recognize the holiday, which turns what was a celebration of colonialism into a chance to celebrate indigenous resistance, to explore how indigenous peoples in the Americas have been oppressed and wiped out, and to organize against current injustices.

In March 2016, the Eugene City Council passed a resolution recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Day. Although Columbus Day is a federal holiday, neither Eugene nor Springfield officially recognizes it as a holiday, the cities say.

Phil Carrasco, co-founder of Grupo Latino de Acción Directa and at the time a Eugene Human Rights commissioner, says the push for city recognition of Indigenous Peoples' Day comes from a long-term goal of going to 4J, Bethel and Springfield school districts "and making a case for bringing in indigenous education, not just Eurocentric education."

The goal, Carrasco says, is to "shift the power dynamic, celebrate ourselves, celebrate our ancestors" and he says to recognize and celebrate indigenous peoples who are both from federally recognized tribes and from places like Oaxaca who are "just as indigenous, but divided by a European border."

Indigenous Peoples' Day, he continues, is a "good and symbolic way to start reconquering our own story, because we are conquered people, and take that narrative and move forward."

After their success in Eugene, Carrasco and indigenous activists Ada Ball and Leilani Sabzalian shifted their focus to Springfield. Ball and Sabzalian brought 30 or so youth from Springfield's Chifin Native Youth Center to the Sept. 20 Springfield City Council meeting to testify in favor of Indigenous Peoples' Day. However, a public hearing was not scheduled, according to Springfield Public Relations Manager Niel Laudati, and only 20 minutes was available for testimony.

Only three or four of the high school students were allowed to speak, Ball tells *EW*. "We had built up the event as leadership and self-advocacy" and, she says, it was a school night, leaving the students initially disappointed after all their work and effort preparing their statements. But the group went outside and the youth were able to testify via Livestream (see the video at eugeneweekly.com).

"That was really beautiful," Ball says.

Ball says that Springfield's Committee for Diversity and Inclusion is now handling the proposal for Indigenous Peoples' Day. Laudati says the committee is working to "set-up a meeting so we can move forward with a recommendation to council." He says the meeting will be followed by a week of discussion.

"Initially we were frustrated," Ball says, but now "we need to take advantage of this process and really talk about it and end up with a stronger proposal."

When asked if she thinks Springfield might vote on the proposal before the Oct. 10 date, Ball replies, "I really hope so. I have blind optimism."

She says the organizers plan to go to the next Springfield City Council meeting on Oct. 3 to advocate again.

Ball also encourages people to attend the Oct. 10 Indigenous Peoples' Day Celebration at the University of Oregon, which is combined with the Native American Student Union's annual Indigenous Solidarity Day at the EMU amphitheater. For more on that event, go to the UO's Annual Indigenous People's Day Celebration event page on Facebook. ■

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