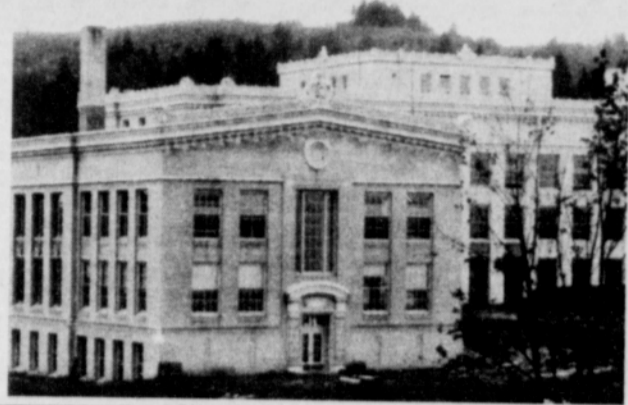


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What's on your list today?.

LOCAL NEWS

Cultural Renewal

Native community works to reconnect with nature, land

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Native American elders gathered for a house meeting at southeast Portland's Kelly Butte House recently to discuss plans on how to move forward with plans to revitalize the traditional connections to food, culture and the land.

Part of the discussion was to secure future funding for the non-profit organization, Wisdom of the Elders, which provides cultural outreach, radio broadcasts and community healing through storytelling programs to Portland's 40,000 Native members.

A priority for the organization, founded in 1993 by Rose High Bear, who is Deg Hit'an Dine (Alaskan Athabascan) and her late husband, Lakota medicine man Martin High Bear, is the transformation of one-third-acre parcel at the Kelly Butte location into a garden.

The garden grew out of a need to address health issues among the local tribal community. Native families also share space at a nearby organic garden plot at Earl Boyles Garden provided by Portland Parks and Recreation.

According to High Bear, a lead voice at the meeting, the Native American population is at the bottom of the list when it comes to healthy outcomes in Portland, from poverty and education to healthcare and the environment.



PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A hillside near Kelly Butte in southeast Portland is slated to become a Wisdom of the Elders garden to re-connect Native families and youth with traditional food, culture and land.

"Over time, our people have lost connection not only to place, but to our plants, foods and culture," said Vanessa Cooper, who runs the Co-operative Extension and Traditional Plants program at Northwest Indian College in Bellingham, Wash.

She said the garden is a reminder to Native people of that connection. "It is reminding us who we are as Native American people and giving us our identity back. When Indian people are disconnected from their culture, they are disconnected to their spirit. Food is our medicine," said Cooper.

Wisdom Elder members shared experiences and traded knowledge and resources.

Marc Anderson of the Oklahoma Seminal tribe, said he felt culture shock when he returned home to reconnect with family in 2009, "The food was all fast food," he said. Even at the Native casino nearby, he could find nothing vegetarian to eat. The big joke, he said, was "I bought a watermelon at Wal-Mart."

Anderson, a self-employed Tualatin environmental engineer and recent vegan, is working on a project to reverse diabetes among Native peoples through the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, which promotes preventative medicine research and reform.

Cooper said diabetes prevention through native plants was the main focus at a conference hosted last year by the Northwest Indian College, which is an institute of indigenous foods and traditions.

This year in September, the college will hold a second gathering in Seattle, Washington, focused on policy changes and other strategies promoting access to traditional foods.

High Bear announced that Wisdom of the Elders has applied for several grants, including with Eco-Trust of Oregon, to have Native families to come work on the Wisdom Garden this summer.

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Sick Leave Benefits Made Law

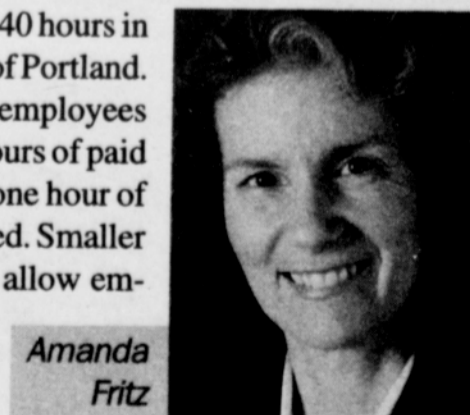
City Council action taken for public health

The Portland City Council voted unanimously to enact standards requiring all businesses to provide sick leave for em-

ployees who work more than 240 hours in a calendar year within the city of Portland.

Businesses with six or more employees will have to provide up to 40 hours of paid sick leave annually, earned at one hour of sick time per thirty hours worked. Smaller businesses will be required to allow em-

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Amanda Fritz