



Thomas Paul
coming to
Pendleton/3C



Germany
cheers beer
purity law/4C



Wild mustangs
put to work in
Oregon/10C

“When we dance, our pride comes back.”

— Acosia Red Elk, jingle dancer



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Gabriel Danzuka, 5, plays the drums with the men during a recent kid's powwow at BMCC in Pendleton. More photos online at www.eastoregonian.com

The art of powwow

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Logan Quaempts seemed a blur of movement and color.

The powwow dancer moved to a driving drumbeat that propelled him around the Blue Mountain Community College gymnasium last week during Arts & Culture Week. Quaempts wore a porcupine roach, feather bustle, mirrored headband and buckskin moccasins with an angora fringe. His style mimicked the antics of a male prairie chicken.

“It’s a courting dance to get the attention of females,” he said after leaving the floor. “It comes from the Midwest.”

Quaempts, at 26, was one of the older dancers this day. The kids’ powwow connected to an earlier presentation called Powwow 101, meant to decode some of the mystery for those unfamiliar with powwows. The floor held mostly younger dancers, including two-year-old Alex Allen of Lapwai, Idaho, who danced enthusiastically and wore a feather bustle about half his height.

On one edge of the hardwood floor were seven drummers providing the heartbeat for the dancers who stomped and swirled nearby. Many of the drummers sported long braids. Unlike the dancers, they wore no regalia, but rather button downs or t-shirts. One read “Keep calm and powwow on” and another bore the likeness of Jimi Hendrix. Devoid of the feathers, bustles and bells worn by the flashy powwow dancers, these men focused on the drum, striking its large top in unison. Their voices melded into melodic, high-pitched chanting, their rhythm changing with each different style of dance.

Sitting between two veterans, young Gabriel Danzuka mimicked every sound and movement of the older drummers. The five-year-old may be little, but he has a fire in his heart for drumming, said his grandmother.

“He practices morning, noon and night,” said LaDonna Squiempfen, of Mission.

The boy’s drum name is Battle Axe, she said. A tribal drum group named Iron Horse gave Gabriel his first real drum



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A group of young ladies participate in a dance during a kid's powwow at the Art & Culture Festival recently at BMCC in Pendleton.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Camille Spino of Adams works on a flower-patterned piece of beadwork for her boyfriend recently while watching a children's powwow at BMCC in Pendleton.

and he holds it in reverence, covering it up when he’s not beating it. He practices in the family’s living room. The weekend before, Gabriel had joined Nixyaawii drummers for a weekend at a salmon feast in Celilo and earned his first money drumming.

“When they are little, they get drawn to it. They like being around it,” said veteran singer and cultural historian Fred Hill, who gave the invocation. “We don’t want to discourage that.”

Gabriel is too young now, but many powwow drummers and dancers hit the powwow trail in the spring and summer, spending their weekends in

competition. Prize money is one reason to powwow, but maybe the most minor.

“It’s our way to stay connected to who we are,” said Acosia Red Elk, a jingle dancer from Mission.

Red Elk, who is a registered member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, has won eight titles at the Gathering of Nations, the world’s biggest powwow. Powwows brings pride.

“A lot of natives feel defeated,” Red Elk said. “When we dance, our pride comes back.”

Annie Smith, who taught Powwow 101, said powwows

show the flavor of a powwow. Normally the dancing starts with a round of intertribal dancing during which anyone can dance whatever style they like, and then a slate of dancing competitions ensues such as men’s traditional, grass, fancy and chicken and women’s traditional, jingle and fancy.

In men’s fancy dancing, Smith said the men exhibit coordination, stamina and strength and wear bustles and roaches with flowing fringe. The style is a crowd pleaser.

“They are vibrant and colorful,” she said. “They are very athletic and at just about every powwow are the crowd favorites.”

Smith said women’s fancy dancers replicate the flight of butterflies. Red Elk’s chosen style, jingle, is an elegant dance with plenty of controlled footwork. She said the women spend a lot of time on the balls of their feet, which gives their calf muscles a workout. As they dance, their dresses jingle from the bells, cones or other adornments sewn onto the material. Red Elk finished sewing about 300 chewing tobacco lids (edges snipped off) onto her black sequined dress before heading to Albuquerque, New Mexico, for the Gathering of Nations on Thursday.

Red Elk is a powwow superstar now, but it wasn’t always that way. When she started as a teenager, she learned by watching videos on YouTube, but was too shy to dance in public for a while.

“I practiced for about nine months before setting foot into an arena,” she said.

Quaempts said he danced in powwows as a boy, but didn’t really get serious until several years ago. He said dancing centers him.

“I danced when I was young, but left the reservation and got lost for a bit,” he said. “When I moved back, I started dancing again.”

Hill said powwow is a way of participating in tribal culture and “giving our young people something they can be proud of.”

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

range in size from small to the massive Gathering of Nations. What they have in common is positive energy, drums, dance and certain components.

“A powwow will always begin with a grand entry,” Smith said.

Smith, Blue Mountain Community College’s Native American liaison, described the grand entry as a procession of royalty, leaders, elders, men dancers, women dancer, teens and then children. An elder carrying an eagle staff leads the way, followed by the American flag and, on this day, the CTUIR flag. BMCC’s fuzzy mascot, Timber, represented the host. Veterans, both tribal and nontribal, were encouraged to walk along.

At large powwows, the grand entry can take 30 minutes or more for all participants to slowly enter to the beat of the drums. Once inside, a song honors veterans and an invocation sets the mood.

“We start each powwow with a blessing, so everyone will have a good heart while they are dancing,” Smith said. “We want positive energy.”

After a welcome by a leader of the host (in this case, BMCC Vice President of Instruction Jim Whittaker), the dancing commences in earnest. This was an abbreviated event to