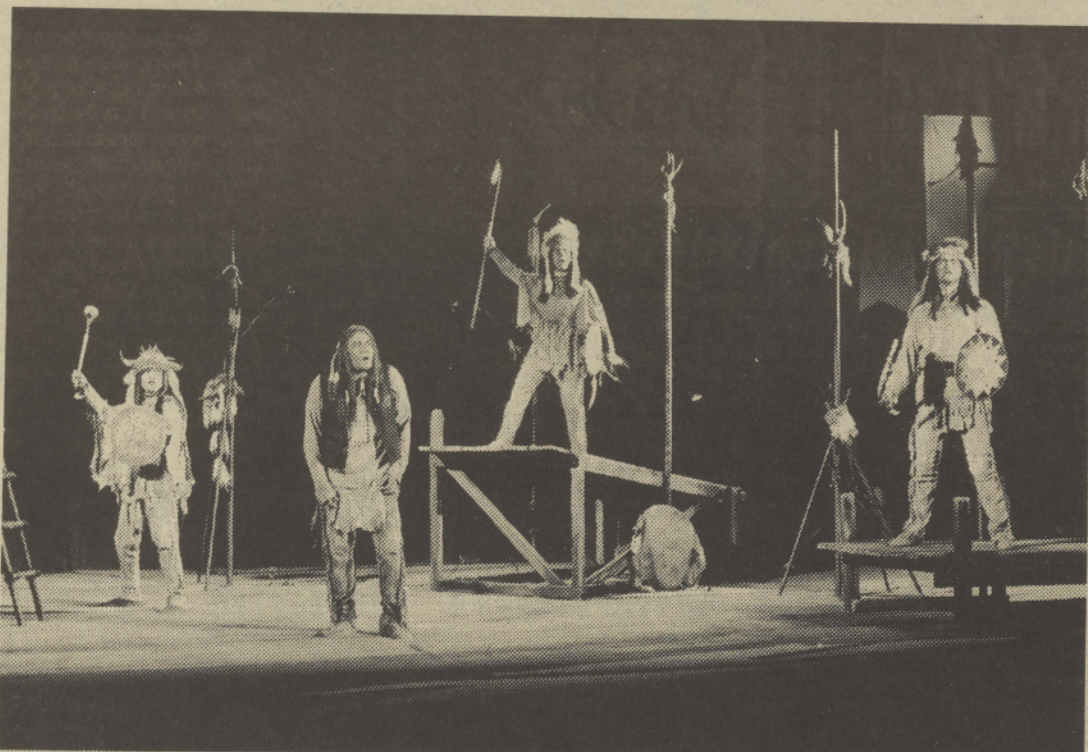


# "Black Elk Speaks" Not Light Entertainment (A Comment)



Black Elk (second from left) and an impressive array of Indian leaders and warriors retold the history of Indians' encounters with the white man in the Folger Theater Group's presentation of "Black Elk Speaks" at the Warm Springs Community Center April 14. C.O.C.C. sponsored the event. CDS Photo

War whoops accented the applause when Black Elk's narrative ended, but elsewhere in the crowd there were tears, embarrassment, exhaustion, shock and even anxiety.

The intensity of "Black Elk Speaks," a two-hour history lesson dramatized by the Folger Theatre Group of Washington D.C. left no one untouched. It was above all else, not an evening of light entertainment. "Did you enjoy Black Elk?" has been an inappropriate question to ask. "Did you endure Black Elk?" might better be answered.

"Black Elk Speaks," a 'short shattering history of the winning of the west as experi-

enced by those who lost it,' was brought to the Warm Springs Community Center April 14 by Central Oregon Community College. For a rare cultural event of this kind, it did not draw the full house expected, but perhaps the same qualities that made it difficult to watch also made it easy for some to avoid.

Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux whose visions and historical accounts were recorded by John G. Neihardt in the book "Black Elk Speaks," was assigned a different role to play in this new drama. He gave a guided tour of Sand Creek, Little Big Horn, Bosque Redondo, Wounded Knee and other sites of the so-called "Indian Wars" of the late 1800's. He acquainted us with such his-

torical figures as Christopher Columbus, Andrew Jackson, Manuelito, Little Crow, Black Kettle and Crazy Horse.

Their messages to modernity were dramatized in a simple set of wooden platforms and a hanging buffalo skin. Costumes were Plains Indian style and when the Anglo military was portrayed, a brass-buttoned coat and military hat were thrown on over the buckskin and braids, creating visual irony.

The sound was also simple, consisting primarily of flutes and drums. Lighting, often subdued but occasionally made harsh for emphasis, cast bigger-than-life shadows on the black backdrop.

Actors' performances were in a few cases inspiring, with special credit due to Clayton Corbin's elderly Black Elk whose beautifully resonant voice boomed from a stooped body with a faltering step.

Henry "Kaimu" Bal's versatility in portraying not only a proud Red Cloud but an uncouth, spitting bystander and a cold, precise Colonel Chivington was also noteworthy.

But too often actors relied on shouting and melodramatic gestures to convey anger and fering. As one viewer commented, he felt uncomfortable being yelled at.

The desired effect was clear enough. There was a shocking story to tell and actors used every bit of their energy and emotion telling it. Horrified and humiliated voices shrieked and wept at the starvation and murder of men, women and children.

For those unacquainted with the Indians' story, "Black Elk" was enlightening. As they learned, the "Indian Wars" went far beyond retaliation against "hostiles" and into the realm of slaughter, with unprovoked attacks on peaceful camps a common occurrence. The play was a tearful and exhausting experience for some.

Although there were both pathetic and heroic Indians with whom to sympathize and identify, there were only buffoons sadists and hypocrites among the Anglo characters (with the exception of two very brief appearances). This proved to be embarrassing for some viewers.

Such exaggerations on both sides were, of course, excusable for the sake of drama. But perhaps in the long run subtlety was more powerful.

The more subtle moments when an Anglo was caught in a flaw of logic, an irony of intent or a backfired bit of deceit were

all too rare. We begged for more understanding of how the "hoop" of Black Elk's vision was broken by the confusion of a divided people. We should have seen both cultures through individuals and not stereotypes.

What we got was a barrage of bitter words and a parade of good buys and bad guys.

When the play ended, the more timid non-Indians in the audience reached up to check for their scalps. Black Elk's call for peace tended to be lost amidst the angry words that preceded it.

The folks who were familiar with the historical and contemporary Indian felt somewhat cheated by the enormous detail (straight out of Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee) without the benefit of increased understanding.

(And incidentally, kids might have been better left with a babysitter. The dialogue was on an adult level and kids grew restless and became disruptive.)

As an initial consciousness-raising effort, "Black Elk Speaks" was powerful and informative. It was an unforgettable experience for all. We need to be shocked at least once, but we also need to go beyond ill feelings to real insight.

Producer Bob Handy referred to his play as a "mission" and "medicine". "Black Elk Speaks" might have performed these functions more effectively if it had been more faithful to the spirit of the original Black Elk. His keen observations of the horror and irony of history, his vision of a closed hoop and his quiet eloquence commanded attention and empathy.

Drama in such a manner would lend dignity to the voices of Indians and inspire respect from those whose ears have been closed to their words.

## Loomis Honored With Health Award

An unsuspecting Lee Loomis, health educator at Warm Springs Indian Health Service, went to a regular Wednesday staff meeting April 12 and was surprised to find himself the center of attention and the recipient of a very special award.

Loomis, who has been with the PHS here for the past five years, was honored with a plaque from the U.S. Public Health Service for "sustained higher quality work performance and dedication in the area of health education services"

here at Warm Springs.

Service unit director Garet Soules, who presented the award, has been here for 15 years and cannot recall any other employee here being honored with such an award during that time.

Soules said that Loomis received the honor because of his effectiveness and dedication in performance of his duties. Soules cited Loomis as the moving force behind the development of the Warm Springs Emergency Medical Technician Courses

which have been conducted in cooperation with the fire department, the tribal police, and members of the reservation community.

Loomis has also designed a patient health education program specifically for the people on the reservation. "An important component of this has been the development of an extensive library of health-related video tapes to be used in small group educational programs, according to Soules.

In the evenings, Loomis has conducted training in the proper use of fire-arms through the establishment of rifle safety clubs for youth on the reservation.

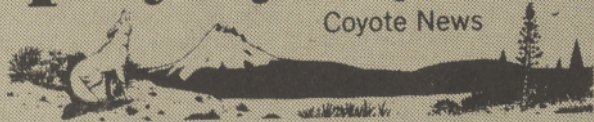
In addition, Loomis has provided classes in Defensive Driving to 300 people, 200 of whom have completed the course. This has provided the Tribal Court with an alternative to just handing out fines. He has also conducted Medical Self-Help courses, participated in the design

and promotion of special diabetic clinics, prenatal classes, and has been extremely effective in the promotion of a school health dental program at the Warm Springs elementary school, says Soules.

"For the past five years, this Officer (Loomis) has effectively put into practice the principles of community involvement in the identification and solution of health problems," noted Soules at the award presentation.

## Spilyay Tymoo

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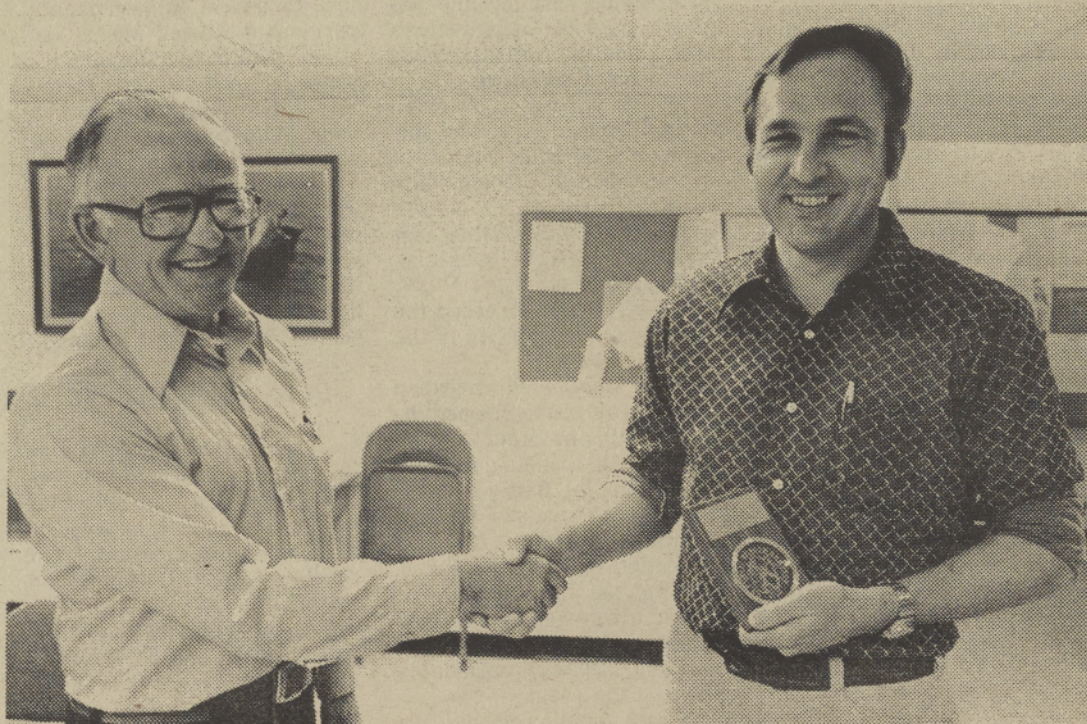
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Garet Soules (left) presents PHS award to Lee Loomis.