

## Yakima's Grand Opening

# New facility pays tribute to history of tribe

by Donna Behrend

With a sigh of relief and a quick wipe of damp brows, the 300 or so hard-working Yakima Indian Cultural Center employees and volunteers were pleased with the dedication of their new facility, June 9.

Even though rain sprinkled on their parade and opening ceremonies, about 2,500 people attended the dedication and browsed through the gift shop, museum, winter lodge, library and theatre.

The day began with a short parade of decorated pickups and vans, fire fighting equipment and small wagons pulled by even smaller ponies.

Following the parade and opening remarks, about 2,000 guests were treated to a free lunch at the Smartlowit Education Center. The Yakima tribe donated elk meat and salmon and the Lummi and Squaxin Island tribes furnished fresh oysters and clams for the feast. Other traditional foods were served as well.

The museum offers great visual pleasure with wall murals painted by Yakima artist Larry George. A tule mat teepee was also set up to provide the foreground for scenic photographs of ancestors and old friends. "Oh, that's the grandfather of...." murmured some of the people touring the 12,000 square-foot museum.

Glass cases contained artifacts belonging to the late-Nipo Strongheart, an honorary member of the Yakima tribe. The library has 12,000 volumes, which were also part of the estate of Strongheart. It was Strongheart who donated his collection to the tribe for proper display and more or less

sparked the idea of the cultural center.

Two films were shown throughout the day in the 400-seat theatre. "Braveheart," a 1923 silent film, brought laughter from the auditorium crowd as an Indian brave won the heart of a non-Indian maiden, only to shunt her affection after he was pronounced chief of his tribe.

Bob Peterson, caseworker for the division of Protection and Advocacy for the Handicapped, provided appropriate piano music to accompany the film. The second film "More than Bows and Arrows" gave an historical review of Indian trials and tribulations. The Sagebrush Associates performed dances and told a brief history of each dance.

A Whitehouse spokesman, Admiral Freeman, presented the Tribe with a letter from President Carter congratulating them on their achievements. Many other local, state and federal officials also attended the opening.

The Yakima architectural firm of Doudna and Williams worked with consultant Pietro Belluschi on the design of the five-building complex. Belluschi is a world renowned architect and has approximately 1,500 buildings to his credit. Belluschi attended the opening and when asked if he thought the complex was what he had imagined, he commented that it was better, obviously proud of his accomplishment.

Center director Gary Young says the surrounding communities have been supportive of the new facility. "Local businesses will probably have an increase in their business because of the



Jimmy Selam explained the construction of a tule mat teepee to (from left to right) Anna Clements, Hazel Tewe and Loretta Selam. Selam has worked with the Indian Life program at the Yakima Cultural Heritage Center for the past 18 months.

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facility." Many feel the complex is the greatest thing that has happened to the valley, which has a population of 250,000. Some people are driving 100 miles just to visit the center and have a meal at the Heritage Inn restaurant, which is also part of the complex.

The center, indeed, is a landmark in the fertile Yakima Valley. It stands as a tribute to the Yakimas, to their enterprising nature and their desire to preserve their past and identity. The facility will insure future generations that their history and culture is accurately documented and permanently recorded.



Recognition lights up the face of Hazel Tewe as she points to a familiar face on an exhibit photo. Such photos make up but a part of the Center's spacious (12,000 square feet) exhibition area that includes artifacts donated by silent film star Nipo Strongheart, a

12,000 volume library, murals by Yakima artist Larry George and a 400-seat theatre. The new complex is expected to bring added business to area merchants.