

# Veterans focus on spiritual healing at conference

By Leslie Mitts  
Spilyay Tymoo

Flames began to crackle as Larson Kalama helped a woman light a fire at the HeHe longhouse.

The woman recently served in Iraq, and for herself and her fellow veterans of war, what would ordinarily be a campfire instead served as a symbol of healing.

The fire burned continuously throughout the weekend for those in attendance at the annual Healing of Veterans Conference, from April 26-29.

Kalama first began the healing circle with the help of fellow veterans and friends at a veteran's hospital in Washington in 1987.

From there the circle expanded and has since traveled through several states and reservations in order to reach as many veterans as possible.

For Kalama, a Purple Heart recipient and veteran of the Vietnam War, the healing circle brings to life inspiration that he saw in a vision at a young age.

As a child, he said, he saw a vision on the way home from church of flames dancing around the steeple.

Kalama then saw seven warriors sitting on the top who then went riding into the white hill

and vanished between the earth and the sky.

"That was the last time I saw them," Kalama said. "Now I know why it happened because I work with veterans."

This year the circle chose to honor women combat veterans specifically, Kalama said.

Elke Bach-Zeeroch proved to be instrumental in building the healing circle in the early 1990s because of her own work with veterans as well as her connection to the Kalama family.

A veteran herself, Bach-Zeeroch had worked with veterans for years and saw that American Indian veterans in particular were struggling for a way to heal spiritually.

It's an event that she said she looks forward to every year—and a process that Bach-Zeeroch feels would be useful for everyone.

"I think situations like this are undervalued in dominant society medicine," she said.

Cyndi Johnson served in Vietnam and said she's attended the healing circle for several years.

Because she suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Johnson said the only place she feels at peace is in nature.

"I love walking in the woods around here," she said.

The first time she attended a healing circle, Johnson realized it was something that she could benefit from.

"They were just all so friendly and wonderful," Johnson said.

She now travels to the healing circle from her home in Washington—and said she feels a great sense of belonging with those at the healing circle.

It's something she hasn't found in the rest of society, Johnson said.

"Just the opportunity to be around other people that are acceptant of the way that you are—it's a very familial feeling," Johnson added. "These people are my family."

After serving in Vietnam, Johnson said she entered a veteran's hospital. While that helped heal her physically, she still felt that her spirit was wounded.

With the help of the healing circle, Johnson said she feels she is being healed spiritually.

"The VA doesn't treat that," she said. "My spirit was gone. This all helps me get back to it."

Jim Waetjen traveled to the healing circle from Prineville. He served in the Korean War and became acquainted with the Kalama family through therapy with the VA in Warm Springs.

Now, Waetjen said, "We've

kind of adopted each other, like brothers."

He said the healing circle is vital to helping veterans. "We feel safe here," he explained. "We're all from the same family."

"It is a place that I feel I can relax and enjoy the company of these veterans and their families," Waetjen added.

Plus, he said, "It is a means of extension of the Native American culture."

Bob "Sandman" Coalson has been a part of the healing circle since it's beginning in the early 1990s.

A veteran of the Vietnam War, Coalson said, "I think that healing from the trauma of war isn't something that you do in one setting or one season."

Plus, he said, "We have to heal in all the ways that we're wounded in war."

Because of that, Coalson said, the healing circle allows him and his fellow veterans to concentrate on the part of healing not typically addressed.

For some, the healing circle is about focusing on spiritual injuries acquired in other parts of life.

Cordell Covert traveled to the healing circle from Washington and said he first began attending healing circles with a friend who was a veteran.

While Covert isn't a veteran of war, he faced his own demons in the form of a wild past of drug and alcohol abuse.

When he first entered a sweat lodge, Covert said, "That really

opened the door to my own spiritual path."

"It's just been a real, real blessing to me personally," he said. "We're just all in it together."

In addition to speakers and time spent in the sweat lodges, veterans had an opportunity this year to work with Heidi Katchia, who attended the circle to deliver the "healing touch."

The healing touch, she said, works with the body's energy centers and the energy field around the body.

"It's basically light touching and hands over the body, working with the energy field," she explained.

See VETERANS on 11



Photo courtesy of Susan Hess

Reuben Henry recently received an award recognizing his work on Tribal Council for the Celilo Housing Restoration project. The project, funded by the Army Corps of Engineers, is helping improve the infrastructure and living conditions of Celilo Village.

## Museum hosting Day of Discovery

The Museum at Warm Springs will host the Seeds of Discovery science day-camp for fourth-graders this Friday, May 11.

This year the science camp will include presentations by the World Forestry Center and the Central Oregon Audubon Society, which will be new at the camp this year.

OMSI will be present, as in years past.

Close to 300 fourth-graders of the Jefferson County 509-J School District will participate in the camp, said Rosalind Sampson, education coordinator at the Museum at Warm Springs.

The Seeds of Discovery science camp is funded by a grant from NASA.

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