

Fire Fighters Appreciation



Duran Bobb/Spilyay

All team members from W.S. Fire Management were honored with a dinner sponsored by tribal elders Rita Squiemphen, Marcia Soliz, Neda Wesley and others. Crews from IHC, Operations, Fuels, and Finance enjoyed a turkey dinner with all the trimmings. The community gathered to thank the firefighters for their efforts during the summer fires of 2011.



Indians see lessons in sweat lodge trial

PRESCOTT, Ariz. (AP) — Self-help author James Arthur Ray faced more than a judge at his sentencing this month for a sweat lodge ceremony that left three people dead. Members of the American Indian community sat through almost the entire trial in silent protest of Ray's use of a sacred tradition.

Ray is serving two years in prison after a lengthy trial that ended in a trio of negligent homicide convictions and that made little mention of Native culture and traditions. He has vowed not to hold another sweat lodge ceremony.

But whether Ray learned not to misappropriate cultures remains to be seen, said Ivan Lewis of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation.

"He desecrated our ceremony, he abused it," Lewis said Wednesday. "He used it in any way that he could just to get his money. He was told before not to do that, and he's paying for it now."

Sweat lodges are commonly used by American Indian tribes to cleanse the body and prepare for hunts, ceremonies and other events. They typically hold no more than a dozen people, compared with more than 50 people inside the one Ray led near Sedona in October 2009.

The ceremony involves stones heated up outside the lodge, brought inside and placed in a pit. The door is closed, and water is poured on the stones, producing heat aimed at releasing toxins in the body. In traditional ceremonies, the person who pours the water is said to have an innate sense about the conditions of others inside the sweat lodge, many times recognizing problems before they physically are presented.

Day after day, Lewis and his companion, Cheryl Joaquin, slipped into a central Arizona

courtroom to listen to trial testimony. Prosecutors hardly mentioned a sweat lodge, instead referring to Ray's event as a "heat endurance challenge." Most of the participants had never been in one before.

The families of the victims—Kirby Brown, 38, of Westtown, N.Y., James Shore, 40, of Milwaukee, and Liz Neuman, 49, of Prior Lake, Minn.—asked Lewis and Joaquin to keep in mind their loved ones when they could not be in court. The couple wore bracelets bearing Brown's name, given to them by her parents. On the day Ray was sentenced, Joaquin's children handed a single red rose to the victims' families to promote healing.

Brown's mother, Virginia, expressed sorrow "that their sacred traditions were defiled in this event."

"We have experienced hundreds of years of generational transgressions against our way of life and the value of human life for the purpose of power and greed," Joaquin, of the Gila River Indian Community, wrote as Ray was being sentenced. "Today we pray and envision a time of unity for all mankind, with a humble understanding of love, peace and harmony."

Lewis was among a group who sued Ray following the ceremony, alleging that Ray violated the Indian Arts and Crafts Act by running the sweat lodge. A federal judge dismissed the civil complaint, saying the act applies to goods, not services.

Bill Bielecki, an attorney representing the Black Hills Sioux Nation Treaty Council on South Dakota's Pine Ridge reservation, said the trial would encourage non-Natives to focus on safety when running sweat lodge ceremonies.

"They're going to look at the facts," said Bielecki, who also

He charged more than \$9,000 to participants of his five-day "Spiritual Warrior" event that culminated with the sweat lodge.

was party to the lawsuit, "You don't use a large sweat lodge, you make sure people can leave and you don't coerce the occupants into staying beyond their limits or capabilities. If you do that, then you avoid gross negligence."

Ray touted his sweat lodge ceremony as "hellacious hot" and said he learned from a Native American shaman. He told participants shortly before they entered the structure that he would incorporate teachings from different cultures and religions, according to an audio recording played by prosecutors. Ray said a friend once told him: "no one has been in a sweat lodge until they've been in your lodge."

He charged more than \$9,000 to participants of his five-day "Spiritual Warrior" event that culminated with the sweat lodge.

Three people died and 18 others were hospitalized, yet others emerged with no problems. The deaths and illnesses sparked outrage among American Indians, who drew distinctions between what Ray did and what would be considered a traditional American Indian sweat lodge.

Jonathan Ellerby, author of "Return to The Sacred: Ancient Pathways to Spiritual Awakening," said the trouble Ray encountered suggests a breakdown in either training, facilitation or the unskilled blending of mate-

rials and practices.

"Sweat lodges and fasting are ancient traditions that promote health and healing when done well," said Ellerby, a non-Native who also has run the ceremonies. "The trouble is that anything that can help, if misused or poorly delivered can hurt, even kill. This raises a lot of questions about qualifications, cultural appropriation and intent."

Native home ownership bill passes Congress committee

WASHINGTON — A bill meant to make home ownership easier for Indians has cleared another hurdle this month.

On Nov. 17, the U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs passed the HEARTH Act.

The HEARTH Act (H.R. 2905) is the "Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act of 2011."

The legislation was designed with assistance from tribal leaders in an effort to amend the Indian Long-Term Leasing Act of 1955.

The new legislation would reform federal leasing requirements and encourage housing and community development in American Indian communities.

It would allow tribes to enter into certain leases without prior expressed approval of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

In sum, the legislation is expected to expedite the lease approval process by allowing tribal governments to approve trust land leases directly.

Specifically, the legislation directs the BIA to prepare and submit to Congress a report detailing the history and experience of Indian tribes that have chosen to assume responsibility for administering the Indian Land Title and Records Office functions from the BIA.

"The HEARTH Act of 2011

will go a long way in strengthening tribal self-determination and tribal economies at the same time," said National American Indian Housing Council Chairwoman Cheryl A. Causley in a statement.

"We know the time frame for individual tribal members to receive a home-site lease is arduous and can be as long as three years under the current Bureau of Indian Affairs process, but we anticipate that these improvements in leasing and enhanced tribal control over surface leasing will help more tribal members get into homes quick."

"The housing strongly supports H.R. 205 because it respects and fosters Indian tribal decision-making, expedites what can often be lengthy federal administrative processes, and will improve the delivery of Federal housing assistance and expand economic opportunity in tribal communities."

In April, Causley testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to support companion legislation, Senate bill 703.

She said then that the bill "respects and fosters Indian tribal decision-making, expedites what can often be lengthy federal administrative processes and will improve the delivery of federal housing assistance and expand economic opportunity in tribal communities."

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