

Return of the Columbia River Indian Fisher's Expo

Standing in a circle, tribal youth opened the Columbia River Indian Fisher's Expo with a traditional prayer song.

Open to Warm Springs, Yakama, Umatilla and Nez Perce members, the event provided resources designed at addressing issues unique to fishing in the Columbia River.

This year marked the return of the expo, hosted by the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, for the first time in five years.

Roughly a dozen organizations set up booths at Skamania Lodge, where CRITFC held the expo. The U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers each had a booth providing education on water and boating safety.

"We've lost a lot of fishermen," said Emerson Squiemphen, of Warm Springs, a CRITFC commissioner and committee member for the Warm Springs Department of Fisheries. "I lost my son like that."

In 2009, Mr. Squiemphen's son drowned in rough waters while out on a fishing boat.

Since losing his son and joining CRITFC, Mr. Squiemphen prioritizes the safety of all tribal fishers through events like the Columbia River Indian Fisher's Expo.

"We've got to educate people on what we do, and why we do it. And teach our young as best we can," Emerson said.

At lunch during the expo, a group of panelists answered ques-



Deanie Johnson, Valerie Switzler and Doris Miller (from left) staffed a booth that shared the traditional names of fish and information on various fish storage methods. A large pickle jar filled with layers of rock salt and salmon belly illustrated one traditional storage method.

tions on the theme *Empowering Tribal Fishers in Public Sales and Farmers Markets*.

Salmon was a favorite at the lunch buffet—fitting, as salmon were a main topic of conversation throughout the day.

While tribal fishers do catch and harvest multiple types of fish, salmon are for many the most important.

"Salmon are so culturally relevant to our people. It's not just a commodity, it's a First Food," said Buck Jones, Cayuse (Umatilla) tribal member and salmon marketing specialist at CRITFC. "Fishing is something our tribal members have been doing since time im-

morial. We respect and honor the salmon."

Fishers of all ages attended. Young children ran between the booths, many of which had ways to engage different generations.

Yakama Nation Fisheries brought a fish tank. One of the safety tents had a bucket of ice water where youth splashed around, and two women from Warm Springs laid out different parts of prepared salmon along with the Kiksht names.

In an old Vlasic pickle jar, layers of rock salt and salmon belly mingled together. The traditional method for preparing salmon belly is not as common these days, but many Warm Springs elders have

memories of eating salted salmon belly prepared that way by their mothers and grandmothers, according to Valerie Switzler, Education general manager for the Confederated Tribes.

"People need to know that the salmon are precious to us," Ms.

Switzler said. "Wasco people have always been here along the big river."

~ Story by Nika Bartoo-Smith, UnderScore News, and a descendant of the Osage and Oneida Nations.

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Blue Ribbon goat at the Fair



Tashina Smith photo.

Arellie Scott with his goat The Boss. Arellie won the Blue Ribbon for showmanship at the 2023 Jefferson County Fair. This is his second year with the Lyle Gap 4-H Club.

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All drummers & dancers welcome
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The Warm Springs Community Action Team is now offering Virtual Reality Training and Career Exploration, and scheduling appointments to use the technology. It's available for adults and youth at the Painted Pony and the Community Action Team office. Contact Emily Courtney or Sara Dowty to schedule a learning time, 541-553-3148.

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