

## Trailblazers hoops with Celilo youth



J.Gavin/CRITFC

Youth from Celilo Village and Columbia River tribal communities participate in a basketball skills clinic with a Portland Trail Blazers coach at the Celilo Mini-Pitch Court.

The Portland Trail Blazers in September visited families and children at Celilo Village for a coaching session. The day was part of the team's Rip City Rally Tour. For the basketball clinic the team and Celilo youth gathered at the newly opened Celilo Mini-Pitch Court. The event honored village elder Karen Jim, and closed with a salmon bake.

"Events like this show the power of sports in engaging our youth," said Jeremy Takala, Yakama Nation tribal councilman, who hosted Celilo clinic.

"The majority of our students are in sports and these kinds of opportunities are encouraging to them all."

The Mini-Pitch Court opened in December 2024 through a collaborative partnership involving the Yakama Nation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other local and tribal organizations. The court sits in the homelands of the Columbia River Plateau Tribes and to an area long tied to Indigenous culture, commerce, and fishing traditions.

The Celilo young people wore t-shirts saying, 'Rip City is in Salmon Country,' designed by the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Communications team, and made possible by a Trail Blazers grant provided before the team's 2024 Native American Heritage Night game.

Celilo Village overlooks the site of the former Celilo Falls, which was submerged in 1957 when The Dalles Dam was completed. The falls had been the central fishing and trading center for tribes since time immemorial.



## Native-led community garden takes root at NAYA in Portland

Lucy Racehorse Suppah stands in the middle of a traditional medicine plant garden laid out in a circle.

"We're looking at some prairie white sage, and then we also have our sweet grass in our stock tanks," she says, pointing to a water stock tank repurposed into a garden bed. "Sweet grass really likes its feet wet, so they have a little different bed for themselves."

The garden is on what used to be a baseball field. The dug out and a scoreboard is still visible some yards away, and vines are now climbing up the backstop.

"We have grapes back there," she said. "So we're also repurposing some of the infrastructure that was in place when we purchased this area."

The garden is called Wapas Nah Née Shaku, which meaning 'Holding the basket' in Wasco. The land is just behind the Native American Youth and Family Center, or NAYA, campus, which used to be a middle school in the Cully neighborhood of Northeast Portland.

Ms. Suppah is an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and half Shoshone Bannock. She is the Indigenous food sovereignty coordinator at NAYA.

The nonprofit runs programming and services for Native American families, youth and elders in Portland, a city that has one of the largest urban Native communities in the nation, representing nearly 400 tribal affiliations, according to the NAYA's estimates.

The community garden got a \$3.6 million boost in 2022 from the Portland Clean Energy Fund, as part of that program's agriculture and green infrastructure investment priorities. The garden is meant to



Jessie Sears/OPB

In September, Lucy Racehorse Suppah collects chokecherry at the NAYA community garden in Northeast Portland

make space for people in and also outside those communities to learn and reclaim traditional agricultural practices.

"There's been a long history of disconnection or an attempt to disconnect us from our identity and our culture," Lucy said. "And my role is to create that access so that that reconnection can happen."

She said this space is about Indigenous food sovereignty and self-determination. Though the garden is small in its footprint—at least for now—it's part of a much bigger movement across the U.S. to reclaim aspects of Indigenous food and culture that, as Lucy said, were not lost, but rather, hindered.

Many Indigenous people lost access to hunting and gathering grounds when they were forcibly removed at the hands of settlers from their ancestral lands, promises of land elsewhere were broken, and Native American children forcibly placed in government-funded boarding schools in an effort to assimilate.

This garden is meant to reclaim

the connection to the land, through traditional foods grown from ancestral seeds or knowledge shared among tribes.

The garden also centers foods and ceremonial plants like tobacco back in their Indigenous context, said NAYA's Ben Sanford, and a member of the Sappony Tribe from North Carolina.

"You really have this great reset point for people that can connect with that knowledge that existed that was nearly wiped out," he said.

Sanford helps educate people about the difference between commercial and traditional tobacco. Traditional tobacco is medicinal and ceremonial, not just a nicotine fix, he said.

"I think as much of this plant as I do my mom, my grandmothers, my aunts, my cousins. It is relative to me, and I want to create connection and communication with this plant," Sanford said. "That's what it's always been used for."

GARDEN continues on 8

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