

White Oak Tree blessed in Silverton

By Brent Merrill

A 450 year-old White Oak Tree at the Oregon Garden in Silverton, believed to be one of the oldest oak trees in Oregon, was recently blessed at a traditional ceremony and a new tree was planted nearby. Students from Heritage School in Salem participated in the blessing ceremony on Friday, April 28.

The blessing ceremony was timed to coincide with National Arbor Day and aimed at honoring our forgotten brothers — the trees.

Arbor Day celebrations were developed to encourage tree planting, care and maintenance.

Students planted a George Washington Tulip Poplar near the large oak tree after reading some of their poetry.

Travis Benoist, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe from Eagle Butte, South Dakota, who works for the Grand Ronde Tribe as a resource specialist and general assistance counselor, conducted the ceremony.

"The cycle of life revolves around the tree," said Benoist. "The tree gives us oxygen, provides us with homes and provides homes for all things that the creator has created that are living. In our way, we recognize them (trees) as the standing peoples."

"A long, long time ago, the old ones had a special spirituality connection with the trees and communicated with the trees," said Benoist. "The trees would let them know when a storm was coming and let them know when weather changes were coming. In a way the trees still do that

anyway without openly speaking to individuals. The trees do have a way of communicating with human beings and let them know how it is surviving and what it needs to have to survive. Trees are alive and sometimes they get sick and they need care. They need somebody to watch over them."

Benoist said he likes the idea of children being included in as many traditional activities as possible.

"As I looked upon these kids at the Oregon Gardens, their little eyes were just wide and sparkling," said Benoist. "That really made me feel good in my heart to see the curiosity that they have."

Benoist lit a braid of sweetgrass under the largest White Oak Tree (known as the Signature Tree) in the Garden. Benoist explained to the students that burning sweetgrass brought good spirits to the ceremony.

"The sweetgrass is grown in marshy lands," said Benoist. "The sweetgrass I get is from Canada. The people I get it from pray over it and ask permission to harvest. They make an offering back — like water to keep the sweetgrass growing. When it is prayed over like that I know it is good and that it brings good spirits."

Trees at the Oregon Garden are being preserved through a grant from the Tribe's Spirit Mountain Community Fund.

"Oregon White Oak trees were important to the Native peoples of Western Oregon," said Fund spokesperson Lora Cuykendall in a press



This signature White Oak Tree at the Oregon Gardens in Silverton is being preserved and maintained through a grant from the Grand Ronde Tribe's Spirit Mountain Community Fund. As part of the Tribe's negotiations with the State of Oregon during the set-up process of the casino, the Tribe agreed to distribute six percent of gaming profits to charitable and deserving organizations. Among the organizations to receive funding in 1999, was the Oregon Gardens.

Photo by Tracy Dugan

release. "It is likely that ancestor's of today's Tribal members encamped under the signature oak and in the surrounding oak grove. The (signature) oak tree is next to a natural camas swale, which is currently in blossom. Camas is a perennial herb that grows up to two feet tall and has vibrant blue blossoms in the spring. Camas was an important staple food for many Native peoples."

Benoist said the tradition of blessing ceremonies is something to hold on to.

"The reason for the blessing is

people take things for granted," explained Benoist. "They take the air for granted. They take the water for granted. They take all living things for granted — the winged ones, the four-legged ones, and the little standing peoples that we get our medicines from. People take a lot of these things for granted. And, so the blessing is to have the creator understand that we bless these things and appreciate these things wholeheartedly. We pray over these things so that they are blessed and so that they continue to grow and survive."

SMART Read program

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Mountain Pick of the Game."

During televised Blazer games, the Blazers came up with specific goals they would have to reach as a team. For example, if the team scored more points or had more assists than the other team in the first half, then a particular school would get \$2,500 towards their SMART Read program from the Community Fund. Several elementary schools benefited during the season from the "Spirit Mountain Pick of the Game."

During the Blazers last home game of the season against the Denver Nuggets, the team awarded the most spirited fans in the audience by picking them out, showing them on the arena's big screen, giving them \$200 and then donating \$2,000 in the fan's name to the SMART Read program.

"One of the reasons the Community Fund Board and the Grand Ronde Tribal Council was excited about this grant is that there have been some outside studies that found the SMART

"The program started in 1992 with eight schools. It is now in 169 schools in Oregon and reaches 8,500 kids."

~ Lora Cuykendall

program is very successful at helping to build new leaders," said Cuykendall. "And, that education is such a key in turning things around for people. Reading is the first step and it fits in beautifully with the values of the Tribal Council and the Tribal members in general."

The SMART Read program is being featured in new television ads that the Community Fund is doing now.

"The television spots are intended to help people realize that the Community Fund exists," said Cuykendall. Along with the television ads, there will be a billboard campaign and a mailer that feature the same look as the television spots.

Native American applicants sought for Hatfield Fellowship

The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon is now accepting applications for the third Mark O. Hatfield Congressional Fellowship. Each year, a Hatfield Fellow is selected from Native American applicants to serve as an intern for a member of Oregon's Congressional delegation.

The Fellowship honors Mark Hatfield for his accomplishments as a U.S. Senator and Governor of Oregon and for his mentorship of many members of his staff who became leaders in their own communities. The Fellowship also honors the memory of former Hatfield aide Susan Long.

"I was honored to host the second Hatfield Fellow in my Washington, D.C. office. The Mark Hatfield Congressional Fellowship provides young people of Pacific Northwest American Indian Tribes the opportunity to help make a difference in their personal lives as well as contribute to the quality of life within their communities," commented Senator Gordon Smith.

"The Hatfield Fellowship will seed Indian Country with capable, motivated individuals who know their way around Washington, D.C. and produce long-term benefits for all the Tribes and the Pacific Northwest," said Len Bergstein, a member of the Spirit Mountain Community Fund Board of Trustees which oversees the internship.

Applicants must be enrolled adult members of federally recognized Tribes in Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Washington, with preference given to the nine federally recognized Oregon Tribes.

Highlights of the Fellowship include:

- The Hatfield Fellow will be rotated every year among the House and Senate members of the Oregon delegation.
- Each Hatfield Fellow will serve for ten months and will receive a stipend, moving and travel expenses, and participation in a special American Political Science Association Orientation.

Application packets may be obtained by contacting
Angela Ellis at Spirit Mountain Casino
P.O. Box 39, Grand Ronde, Oregon 97347
or call 1-800-760-7977, ext. 3957

Emergency Assistance Notice

Tribal members needing emergency assistance during the month of June will need to utilize their Tribal Member Benefit money first. The Social Services Department will freeze funds from their Emergency Assistance program, the Benevolence Fund and the General Assistance program from June 11-July 11.