

Aspiring Basket Artist

"Each basket sings its own song."

~ Sam Henny



Anyone interested in learning Sam's basket making technique, please contact her at 503-879-3896 or sam.henny@spiritmtn.com

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Sharing is clearly the spirit of the endeavor, as Henny considers the idea of financial gain ludicrous. Art, she ventured, is purely its own reward and the only money desired from the class would be to offset the cost of materials.

Henny has always, throughout her personal history, been artistically inclined. She has dabbled in, and continues to dabble in painting, drawing and calligraphy. But for whatever reason, her latent talent is in basketry.

"Honestly," she said, nodding. "I weave every day."

Although the idea for basketry entered her head long ago, Henny never entertained the thought until she worked at the Song Basket Marketplace, the small craft store formerly located off of Highway 22 in front of Spirit Mountain Casino.

"We sold lots of arts and crafts there," she said. "But I noticed a major lack of baskets even though it was in the name."

Thus her goal to absorb the skill, and ascend to its highest levels.

"I'd like to be a master weaver," she declared.

How one achieves that status she confessed not to know, but nonetheless that is her lofty aim.

Numerous samples of Henny's work abound in her office and near the desks of co-workers. The sizes of the baskets vary — some are palm-size, others comparable to a coconut or human head. The shapes equally vary, from simple vase to warped cylinder. But no other quality of the baskets could be more emphatic than that of color.

Simple cream-colored hemp twine forms the "skeleton" of a basket, and

BASKET DISPLAY — Grand Ronde Tribal member Sanda "Sam" Henny considers her basketry to be her art. Despite her immense respect and admiration of traditional basketry, she is willing to try new things with her art. Her style and easy manner have led to a following of Tribal members interested in learning more about Native basketry.

that is fleshed over by handsome Pendleton wool and yarns that boast colors for which Henny is eternally grateful.

One basket is a cauldron-shaped medley of strong earthy rust and rich turquoise, another a harmonious blend of aquatic shades. Her prized work, a slight cone-shaped piece with its top lopped off, features a series of earth-toned triangles, all of which acknowledge skyward, presumably a reflection of the artist's mood.

"Yes, that was a definitely a very 'up' time in my life when I finished that one," she said proudly.

The amount of time to make a basket depends, naturally, on size, complexity and of course skill. Henny estimates a medium-sized basket can take roughly two to three weeks, and if she's especially enamored of one, even less.

Although she originally learned designs patterned after traditional Columbian Plateau baskets, Henny has since then ventured off into a different direction. She displays a love of geometry, as many baskets are adorned with triangles and other basic shapes, such as loops and semi-circles. Most of her designs are impromptu, for she has learned, like many artists across the globe, that the best ideas come to you, and not vice versa.

"Each basket sings its own song," she said.

Her work has not gone unappreciated. Spirit Mountain Casino had an exhibit of her work in July of 2000, and the Tribe included one of her baskets in its poster for the Restoration Act of 1983. And this is saying nothing of the numerous requests she receives from Tribal members and non-Tribal members alike to make baskets for them.

Henny downplays the popularity of her work, noting that she is rarely satisfied with any single project.

"Look at this one here," she said, grabbing the rust and turquoise marvel from atop the shelf. "I screwed up on this triangle over here."

"Or this one," she held one out and pointed to the top, where an awkward looking knot jutted out. "I still had a hard time learning to finish."

The notion that there is always room for improvement could be ideally suited in the confines of such a creative mind, especially one that looks to be a teacher. Yet Henny is not so selfish as to just push her own agenda. What she really wants is more people, Native American or not, to open up to art.

"I think an art institute or more classes out here would be wonderful," she said. "We need more art,

not crafts."

"We can't just keep displaying artifacts all the time," she added. "We've got to create some new ones."

The eagerness to create something new serves adequately to inspire Henny, but unfortunately it has also drawn the ire of traditionalists. On one occasion a would-be critic bluntly told her the baskets "weren't like Grand Ronde." It was an ignorant statement, spawned from arrogance, and yet it stung.

"I'm from Grand Ronde," she said. "So (as an artist) isn't what I do 'Grand Ronde'?"

For Henny, the central issue is that people are simply copying old designs, oblivious to the notion that even those "traditional" designs would not have arrived at their present state had not somebody, at some point, deviated from a formula. Is not Native American art, she offered, art done by Native Americans? Some think that distinction belongs only to work that replicates art taken from a specific time frame in Tribal history. For example, is "traditional" forever to be that which mimics pre-settler art, since it is not influenced by Western ideas?

"We are trying to recreate something that is gone," she observed. "We have to move on at some point."

"Those who set the rules," she said, alluding to the "traditionalist" experts. "They weren't around back then."

"To set boundaries isn't traditional, it's contemporary."

Henny has met with numerous basket-weavers of note, and they've been routinely impressed by her work.

"They tell me 'Whoa! Your stuff really stands out,'" she said.

Is that good?

"Yes!"

Veterans' Memorial to hold Fundraiser in Willamina

■ MARCH 30: Banquet and Auction will be the first fundraiser of the year for the Veterans' Memorial effort.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's Veterans' Memorial Ad Hoc Committee will hold their 1st Annual Dinner and Auction on **Friday, March 30** at the VFW (Veteran's of Foreign Wars) Hall in Willamina. The dinner will begin at 6:30 p.m. and the auction is scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m.

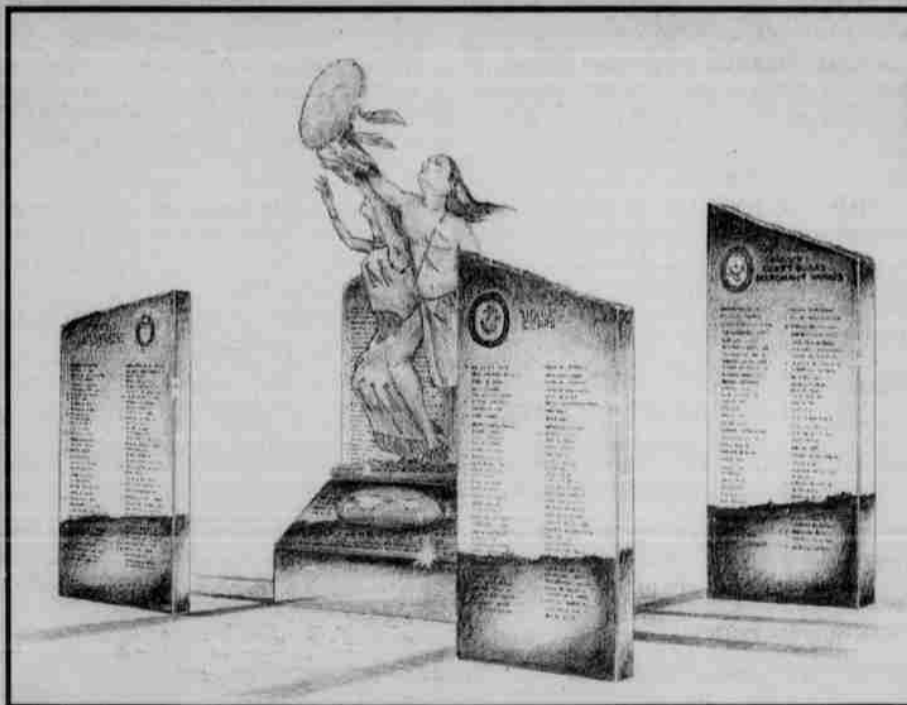
Dinner tickets are \$7.50 and can be purchased from Veterans and members of the Memorial Committee. The purchase of a dinner ticket also makes you eligible for this year's door prizes — including a PlayStation 2.

There will be a silent auction as well as the regular auction. Items in the auction will include a TV, art, free dinners, lodging and a Pendleton blanket.

The committee has raised over \$40,000 so far and the goal is to raise \$300,000 by the completion of the project, which is scheduled to be finished in May of 2003.

Dinner and raffle tickets may be purchased by contacting members of the Memorial Committee and one of the following people:

Brent Merrill — Tribal Public Information office 503-879-2321
Mike Larsen — Tribal Facilities department 503-879-2407
Gene Hancock — Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs 503-373-2156
Lloyd "Bud" Abbott — VFW Hall in Willamina 503-876-4540



PLACE OF RESPECT — The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's Veterans' Memorial Ad Hoc Committee is raising funds for a planned memorial to honor our men and women Veterans. The memorial will honor both Tribal and non-Tribal Veterans from the communities of Grand Ronde, Willamina and Sheridan. The memorial is unique in that it is a joint-effort with Tribal and non-Tribal Veterans and in that it will prominently honor our women Veterans as well as our men.

Artist drawing by Steve Bobb