

Sisters Travel to San Diego to Compete in Marathon, Survive to Finish

■ Inspired by Olympic legend Billy Mills and supported by family at home, Tribal members compete in ultimate athletic event.

By Willie Mercier

Two Tribal members recently competed in an event most of us will never even think of doing.

On June 3, Connie Lopez, who lives in Sells, Arizona, and her sister Carmen Brown, who lives in Sheridan, recently participated in the "Rock and Roll Marathon" in San Diego, California. Lopez and Brown are the daughters of Darrel and (the late) Ruth Mercier of Grand Ronde.

This was the fourth marathon for Lopez, but the first for Brown. Lopez who has been running long distance for three years and tries to run anywhere from four to six miles everyday.

"I went to see Billy Mills talk and he really inspired me, I owe a lot to him," said Lopez of her inspiration to pursue distance running.

Billy Mills, a Native American from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, was the first American to win a gold medal in a 10,000-meter Olympic race. Mills won the gold medal at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games. Mills set an Olympic record of 28 minutes and 24.4 seconds and shocked the world.

Lopez finished the marathon, a distance of 26 miles, in 5 hours and 45 minutes with Brown not far behind at 6 hours and 11 minutes.

"I'm very proud of her," said Lopez of her sister Carmen's first-ever long distance running competition. "With this being her first marathon, she did very well."

Brown has only been running long distances for a short amount of time. She asked Connie, who ironically is the Billy Mills-type inspiration of her potential low-key running future, to go with her in her first marathon.

"As far as future running, I see myself entering half marathons once in a while, but I don't know," said Brown of her running career. "I'll encourage Connie and then just know that it was a great thing that we did."



Sisters Connie and Carmen



Photos by Michael Brown

Inspired — Sisters Connie Lopez (Mercier) and Carmen Brown (Mercier) recently participated in the "Rock and Roll Marathon" in San Diego, California. Connie said she was inspired by Olympic legend Billy Mills. Carmen, who competed in her first marathon, said she was inspired by Connie. Here, they check the race results.

A Mid-Summer's Day Dream

Oregon Garden's grand opening celebration is a showcase for beauty.



Photo by Willie Mercier

Traditional Blessing — Spiritual Leader F. Travis Benoist, of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, performed a traditional blessing and a song with his wife Phyllis and daughter Cheryl. Benoist was part of the garden's weeklong grand opening celebration.

Grand Oak

At the center of the Oregon Gardens project in Silverton is this magnificent White Oak tree that is recognized as the oldest living Oak tree in Oregon.

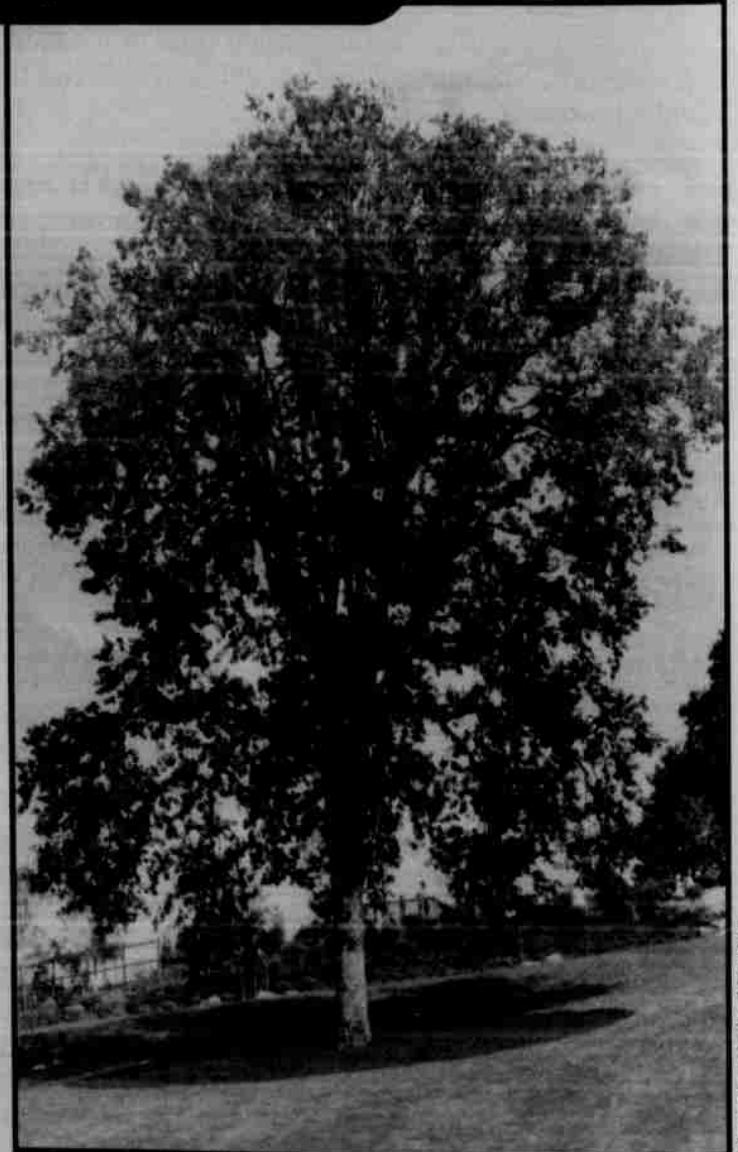


Photo by Willie Mercier

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Beauty is all around us — just take a look. One of the best places to look for beauty is in Silverton (east of Salem) at the Oregon Gardens.

It was a long awaited time as the Oregon Gardens celebrated its Grand Opening in style from June 29 through July 3. "Come Watch us Grow" was the theme for the opening.

Nearly 50,000 people (48,940) visited the gardens during the weeklong event.

Spiritual leader F. Travis Benoist, of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, opened the event with a blessing and a traditional song. His wife, Phyllis, and his daughter Cheryl joined Benoist in the blessing ceremony.

Benoist said he took time to drive through the park and to ride on one of the carts provided to people touring the facilities.

"I have seen a lot of different people really, re-

ally enjoying themselves," said Benoist.

The Oregon Gardens is a showcase for three water gardens, an Oak grove that contains the oldest living Oak tree in the state, the Silverton Market Garden and a garden patch planted by young people from Silverton High School.

The 65 acres of the garden's phase one took just over three years and \$20 million to complete. Over 7,000 individuals, groups and organizations contributed to the garden project, including the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon through the Tribe's Spirit Mountain Community Fund.

Water and electricity was brought to the project by over 11 miles of PVC piping.

When completed, the gardens will encompass more than 240 acres.

For more information, you can visit the garden's website at www.oregongardens.org. Summer hours are from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the facility is open daily except for the Christmas, Thanksgiving and New Year's holidays. Throughout July and August, the Oregon Gardens will host a series of concerts — including world-class musicians like jazz vocalist Diane Schuur, the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and the Oregon Symphony.