

Native Rapper Reaches Out To Local Youth

■ Litefoot performs in Grand Ronde, shows why he is a role model.



Intelligent Rhymes — Native American Rapper Litefoot performed in Grand Ronde on Friday, January 17 at the Tribe's new gymnasium on their new education campus. Litefoot's lyrics present a thoughtful and relevant alternative to many of today's music stars. Litefoot focuses his songs on issues facing Native youth today and mixes information about social, political and historical injustices into his presentation, while still managing to rock the party with beats that got the crowd jumping.

"He's stayed true to his people."

By Peta Tinda

Native American rapper Litefoot was in Grand Ronde on Friday, January 17, and rocked the house with energy and enthusiasm that had the crowd on its feet.

Litefoot, who is probably best known for his roles in the movies "Indian in the Cupboard," "Kull the Conqueror," "Song of Hiawatha," and "Mortal Combat 2: Annihilation," has long been a role model for Native youth across the nation.

He has also received many awards from groups like the American Indian Film Institute and First Americans in the Arts. A poll taken in 1998 voted Litefoot "Best Indian Role Model," and "Favorite Indian Performer." In 2001, Vibe magazine called Litefoot "The leading Native American MC." Earlier this year, he won his fourth Native American Music Award.

Litefoot's main goal, he said, is to break down stereotypes of Native people.

"My people don't wear headdresses, and we don't ride horses," he said.

Apart from his career in acting, Litefoot has released several albums since he started rapping in 1988. He heads his own record company, Red Vinyl Records, which specializes in signing and promoting Native recording artists.

"He has a real positive message," said Lisa Leno, Youth Education Supervisor, who helped put on the show. "And a lot of young people listen to rap music. Litefoot has done a lot of positive things in Indian Country. We want our young people to see success, to see that their goals are attainable."

The free concert was held at the gymnasium of the new education building.

The Grand Ronde Tribal Youth Education Department put on the show. At least 150 kids

showed up for the performance, making the show a success. There were Tribal youth from as far away as Yakama, Washington and Chemawa Indian School, and many Grand Ronde kids and Tribal members in attendance as well.

Most of Litefoot's songs address issues facing Native youth of today, including drug and alcohol abuse, but he never strays far from his message of Native Pride.

"I feel like I have a responsibility to represent Native people," he said.

Litefoot emphasized that drugs and alcohol are the primary factors in keeping Native youth from achieving their dreams. He said that he feels that there are still many issues that need to be dealt with, but looks to the Creator for strength.

Litefoot's acting career has taken a backseat in recent years to his mission of enlightening Native youth. He has dedicated his life to Indian people, and teaches them through his songs to dedicate their lives to what is important to them.

"He's a role model," said Leno. "And he's stayed true to his people."

"I feel like I have a responsibility to represent Native people."

~Litefoot



Local Rappers — Tribal member and Mentorship Program Management Trainee James Buxman helped organize the concert as he takes a turn working with the Tribe's Education Department (he has worked in Social Services and Public Information as well so far) and here gets loose for the camera with Lt. Juan Sifuentez of the Tribe's Security Department



"He Danced With Me" — Many local youth, and young people from all over Oregon and Washington, were excited to get up close to Litefoot. He brought some young people up on stage to dance with him and reached out to touch others.

Photos by Peta Tinda