

## Natives Combine Spirituality With Traditional, Cultural Beliefs

■ First Nations Gatherings held in West Salem at the Life Church.

By Peta Tinda

"Acts 2:42... and they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

"That's what Indians like to do," said Karvk Tribal Elder Hugh Grant, reciting his favorite passage from the Bible. "We come together, we like to visit, we like to eat, and we like to pray. That about covers what Native people did."

Grant was one of about 50 to 100 Natives and friends who meet once a month to eat, socialize, sing and pray to the Creator in a good way.

"We don't allow no preaching," said Grant, who drove down from Portland with his wife, Mary. "It's more about acceptance. There's no pressure."

The Salem First Nations Gathering, as it's called, is held in the Life Church in West Salem. The people began to show up at six. They gather and sit down to a potluck dinner. They sat and ate and laughed and visited. Many bought kids or grandkids. Several familiar faces from Grand Ronde were

there.

Tribal Elders and Veterans were there, too. People got up and talked. No one rushed. Then they all filed into the pews and said a prayer. Some people on the stage began to drum, filling the church with the sound.

Grand Ronde Tribal member and Color Guard Veteran Bob Webb was there. When asked why he came, he pointed at the drum and said - "What other church are you going to hear a drum? You can feel your heart beat with it. When you're with your people you can relax and let it flow," said Webb.

Dale Wheeler, of Camas, Washington, said he comes for the feeling of acceptance that he only gets with other Natives.

"It's a nice chance to meet. Yes, most of us are Christian and Native, but why can't we be Christian and Native? We're all different Tribes, coming together. That's



Photos by Peta Tinda

**One Heart, One People** — Dale Wheeler, a Native from Camas, Washington, speaks at the Salem First Nations Gathering, a monthly meeting of Natives from around Oregon and Washington whom come together to sing, drum and worship.

what's important," said Wheeler.

"We're here to honor Jesus Christ as the Creator intended us to do," he said. "The Creator made us so we can sing and drum and dance, so why shouldn't we do those things? Many are scattered and this brings us together."

One of the main functions of the gathering is to bring together Natives, many of who have been raised in different denominations, and put aside their differences and worship together.

"There's more freedom of worship," said Burns Piauete Tribal member Vernon Kennedy. "We all pray to one God, one Creator."

Kennedy said that he comes to the gathering in part because the drum reminds him of home.

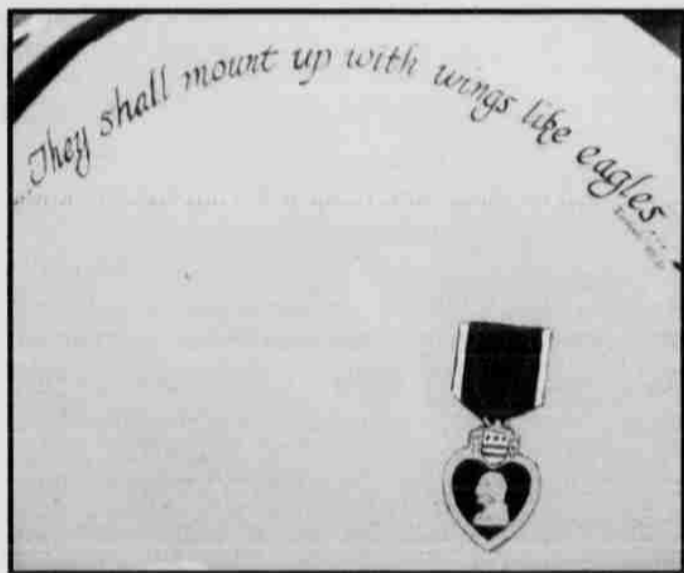
"It inspires me," he said. "It lifts my spirit up, hearing the drum and being around the drum and being with Native people and culture. I feel like I'm at home with Native people."

Kennedy said that many Natives are afraid of churches because of what happened in the past, but said that this was less like a church and more like a community gathering.

He encourages others to come and participate in the gathering.

"We welcome anyone to come and take part and listen and learn. We want to see more Natives come and be apart of this," said Kennedy. "It gives us hope and strength."

For more information call Arlene Harlouf at (503) 370-7156.



**Drum** — A prayer and a Purple Heart decorate the drum of Marshall TallEagle, a Native Veteran who goes to the gatherings regularly.

## Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Fighting BPA Salmon Decisions

■ 2001 electricity scams cut fish and wildlife funds.

By Ron Karten

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is inefficient and unreliable, an agency that is in "arrant violation of its treaty trust responsibilities," according to Donald Sampson, Executive Director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), and at the same time, it is "the salmon's only hope." The quotes come from a draft CRITFC op-ed piece he brought with him to the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) Winter conference in Portland on February 11, and the sentiment was the heart of his presentation.

The 2001 Enron energy scams combined with California's stillborn attempt to deregulate the electricity market, resulted in BPA purchasing way too much of way too expensive elec-

tricity. That led to this year's proposed budget cutbacks, which could mean a \$139 million cap on fish and wildlife

power from California. It under-spent \$227 million of \$252 million in fish and wildlife money that it acquired from

**"Like it or not, Bonneville, with its meager support for fish and wildlife programs, is the salmon's only hope."**

~Donald Sampson  
Executive Director of the  
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission

tricity. That led to this year's proposed budget cutbacks, which could mean a \$139 million cap on fish and wildlife

spending for 2003. Compare that with \$242 million that Northwest Indian Tribes are proposing and \$186 million the agency originally intended to spend. "...The federal wholesale electricity marketer oversubscribed the 29-dam Columbia River Power System by more than 3,000 megawatts in 2001 to alleviate a baseless "energy crisis," leading to a \$1.2 billion budget shortfall this year and a possible 25 percent cut in fish and wildlife funding," according to the op-ed draft.

"It used fish recovery funds to pay for high cost

ratepayers. It breached fish and wildlife contracts with Columbia Basin Tribes and routinely reneged on other funding agreements."

At the same time, the feds have thrown out their annual proposal to privatize BPA, and limit the agency to for-profit kinds of expenditures, which would undoubtedly rule out any funding at all for fish and wildlife. While Northwest legislators fight off the privateers, fish and wildlife are left holding the bag.

"Like it or not," according to Sampson's op-ed piece, "Bonneville, with its meager support for fish and



Photo by Ron Karten

wildlife programs, is the salmon's only hope."

At the same time, ATNI representatives unanimously passed a resolution in support of "a complete financial and management audit of BPA's implementation of the Fish and Wildlife Program..." ■

