

Power Of The Drum Is Showcased At Agency Creek Round Dance

■ Second annual gathering is about healing, ceremony and tradition.

By Peta Tinda

The second annual Agency Creek Round Dance was a time for people to join hands, dance, pray and be healed by the power of the drum and the sacred songs that filled the Tribal gymnasium on those two nights.

The dance was hosted by the Grand Ronde Tribal Youth Social Services Program. A traditional meal of salmon was served for guests on both nights.

Drums from as far away as Warm Springs, Umatilla, Yakama and Saskatchewan attended the dance. There were singers from such well known drum groups as Black Lodge and Black Stone, as well as Grand Ronde's own Eagle Beak Singers.

"It's a very sacred thing," said Algin ScabbyRobe, of the Black Lodge Singers. "It's a healing dance; there are certain ceremonial songs... it's way different than a pow-wow or any other social thing. It's to help you."

A Round Dance differs from a pow-wow in several key ways.

To begin with, a fire is lit and kept burning during the course of the dance. The entire gym is smudged with sage to cleanse it of any bad spirits or feelings.

All of the songs at a Round Dance are also prayers, each with a specific meaning. Some songs are just for Veterans. Others are to honor Elders. The dance always starts in the evening and goes until early in the morning; because that's when the spirits are out.

There are no infants allowed on the floor during the dance, because of its sacred nature. Participants need not wear regalia or dress up for the dance. There is no competition, no categories and no prizes. There is, however, a giveaway for all of the visitors. Community members are asked to donate items to the giveaway, to give thanks to the

singers for coming and singing for the people. And absolutely no drugs or alcohol are permitted.

"All of the songs are to be danced to," said Tribal Language Specialist Bobby Mercier, who volunteered to help with the dance. "We asked the singers to come and help us with our prayers. We've been having a really bad year. We had a really hard winter and we've buried a lot of our Elders. That's why we do this, for all of the people who passed on... we're just praying for them and their families and that this year won't be as hard. That's the main reason."

"It's a good turnout for the second year," said Kenny ScabbyRobe, as he sipped his coffee and looked around the gym. "It took two or three years for it to catch on back home, so with these good songs, I

think it will grow."

About 150 people attended the dance on both nights, which, following tradition went until early in the morning.

"The purpose of a Round Dance," said Grand Ronde Tribal member Bob Tom, who emceed the event, "is for the people of the community. We all know the power of the drum and the songs work. Drums are a big part of our Indian life. Birth, death, weddings, the drum is always there, start to finish. It's very powerful. It just works. And the sign of it

working is that it gets bigger every year. Look around you," Tom said. "There are young people, Elders. They are healthier by being here, in this circle, so it's working."

Photos by Peta Tinda



Someday — Traven Joseph and his older sister Shalene fell asleep during the Round Dance, which following tradition went until early in the morning.



Recording Artists — Algin ScabbyRobe (center) of the well-known drum group Black Lodge Singers, leads during the second night of the Round Dance.



Ghost Dancers — Community members join hands and dance in a circle around the singers, many of whom came from as far away as Washington and Saskatchewan to sing at the Round Dance. An estimated 150 people attended the dance, which was held at the Tribal Gymnasium in Grand Ronde on May 21-22.