

Elder Honor Day

■ Elders from many Tribes come together.

By Ron Karten and Jack Ham

"I attend every one I can make it to," said Siletz Tribal Elder Ed Ben. "I come here to visit some of my old acquaintances. There's one I haven't seen in five years."

For Coos Chief Ed Bower, Elder Honor Day is "a tradition. This is a great hall of wisdom," he said. "You've got more wisdom here than in the state capitol."

Two hundred and three Elders from six Tribes across the Northwest filled the Tribal gymnasium for the two-day, 2004 Elder Honor Day. In addition to Grand Ronde Tribal Elders, Elders representing Siletz, Coos, Klamath, Swinomish and Umatilla participated.

In preparation since the end of last year's event, volunteers putting together this year's event included Elders Arlene Beck, Chair of Elder Committee; Cherie Butler, Vice Chair and Louise Coulson, Secretary.

"It's a rejuvenation from year to year," said Chief Bower.

Mandelas, lap robes and boxes with Native objects, like dolls, inside went to the oldest women attending. This year's honored included Tribal Elder Nora Kimsey, 95, who was the oldest Elder in attendance. The oldest visiting Elder woman was Eva Watchman, a Umatilla. Her age was not available.

The oldest men received lap robes, drums and key chains. Grand Ronde Elder Albert Peters, 84, won for the home team and Bud Ingersall, a Coos, won for the visiting Elders. His age also was not available.

All in attendance received gifts and bingo winners received prizes including coffee pots, picture frames and pillows.

"Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves," said Beck.

Many volunteers worked in the kitchen to help serve three meals over the period of the two-day event. They served lunch and dinner on Friday and breakfast on Saturday.

Included among attendees was Klamath Elder Mary Jane Sheppard, who has appeared in two movies, "Sacred Ground" made in 1983, and "Spirit of the Eagle" produced in 1990.

"We call her Miss Kla-mo-ya," said fellow Klamath Elder Larry Baldwin. Kla-mo-ya is the name of the Klamaths' casino. It represents the three Native American Tribes — the Klamath, the Modoc and the Yahooskin Indians — that own the casino. These three Tribes are collectively known as The Klamath Tribes.

In "Spirit of the Eagle," Miss Kla-mo-ya was one who "helped build the fires and gather the wood," she said. In "Sacred Ground," she played the Elder who threw rocks and hit the star, Jack Elam, in the back. "I was the bad lady," she laughed.

She said that her rocks hit him so hard that he turned to the director and said, "If you didn't get that (shot) I won't do it again!" according to Miss Kla-mo-ya.

Many described the meeting in terms of friendships, old and new:

"I can meet new people and see old ones," said



Movie Star — Klamath Tribal Elder Mary Jane Sheppard, standing, and Pit River Tribal Elder Geneva Barlese share a moment during Elders Honor Day. Not so long ago, Sheppard appeared in two Hollywood movies, "Sacred Ground" in 1982, and "Spirit of the Eagle" in 1990.

Umatilla Tribal Elder Bertha L. Case.

"Just to be with everybody," said Umatilla Tribal Elder Dilliam Van Pelt.

"It's great. We need this to (get to) know people that aren't our own," said Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Dorothy Lawe.

"We get to socialize with people from other Tribes as well as my own," said Grande Ronde Tribal Elder Gloria Sundahl.

"I like to help the Elders whenever I can," said Grand Ronde Tribal member Linda LaChance, who volunteered at the intake desk.

"To visit the Elders, see new faces and get together," said Siletz Tribal Elder Donna Kessinge.

"To see all the people from Grand Ronde and other reservations who are always happy to come here," said Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Margaret Provost.



Gifts — Interested in the arts and crafts of Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Charlotte Gray, second from the right, are from left, Rayson Tupper (Modoc), Mary Jane Sheppard (Klamath) and Shannon Sampson (Klamath).



Gathering Of Elders — From left: Janet Phillips, Wilma Fenwick, Sharon Hanson, Tom LaChance, Ruby Bigoni, Bernice Jensen and Pearl Lyons.



Heavy Medal — Mick Herron, 23, serves America in the U.S. Army. Due to his busy schedule, Herron is unable to attend Veteran events in Grand Ronde. On July 26, lead Veteran Gene LaBonte (right) honored Herron with a Veterans' medal and a Veterans' Memorial t-shirt. Herron takes a moment to pose with his family, (above), and accepts his medal with pride.

