

2004 Grand Ronde Contest Pow-wow Successful, Despite Weather

Photo by Marty George



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Fancy — The Grand Ronde Annual Contest Pow-wow has become one of the premier Native celebrations in the Pacific Northwest, attracting hundreds of dancers from all over the United States and Canada, like these Women's traditional category dancers (left) photographed on Saturday and this young fancy Shawl Dancer (above).

By Ron Karten & Peta Tinda

Rain was one of the big stories at this year's Annual Contest Pow-wow. On Saturday afternoon, the dancers moved into the Tribal gymnasium and vendors showed their expertise at manipulating plastic sheets to keep out the rain.

By Sunday afternoon when the sun had come out again, vendor spaces were empty here and there and one overheard vendor said, "Everyone else left but we stayed."

For some, the rain had killed whatever business they had hoped to do during the weekend, but not all were disheartened.

It was "great anyway" for Cameron Blagg III, who represents the artwork of Cameron Blagg, his father. He had packed a lot of framed art and sculptures into the center of his booth to keep it from the rain, but plenty still decorated displays at eye-level.

"I met people this weekend whose grandparents and parents have collected my father's work, and now they're collecting it," he said.

"It's not as good as when everybody's outside, but it's ok," said Margaret Place of Salem, a vendor selling arts and crafts made mostly by inmates. "Pow-wows are much more receptive to inmates' art," she said.

Dancers came from all over to participate.

Nathan Mitsuing (Cree) from Loon Lake, Canada came for the men's Grass Dance. He was headed to Connecticut next.

Westlee Witcraft (Klamath) came for the Traditional dances with his cousin, Gary John (Klamath), and they were headed for the Klamath Restoration in Chiloquin the next weekend.

"If they can get a ride (to a pow-wow) somewhere, they're gone," said John's mother, Candi Kirk (Klamath).

Tribal member Joann Mercier, who works for Spirit Mountain as a Human Resources Specialist, said on Saturday afternoon that she had never seen so many dancers. "It makes me really proud to see so many dancers," she said.

However, when dancers and audience crushed into the gymnasium to avoid the rain, some of the sentiment changed.

"It's way too crowded," said Tribal

dancer Harris Reibach.

Asked for something positive about being inside this year, Reibach's fellow dancer, Tribal youth Joey Holmes, said, "No rain."

Asked about dancing on the gym

floor, one dancer said, "It's always different dancing on a gym floor." hours from Phoenix, Arizona, where she works as an Administrative Assistant for a Tribal Police Department. She and her two girls J'Shen and Jacinta are Traditional dancers and said they came back for the feast.

"We came three years ago and they had salmon, so we came back," she said, referring to the free dinners served for guests during the pow-wow.

For Linda Allenby (Cherokee), a veteran from Salem, the

Tribe ought to set up a booth to help Indians trace their Native American heritage.

Cory Johnson of White Swan said that he had been coming to the Grand Ronde pow-wow so long he "kind of lost count."



Photo by Peta Tinda

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Cynthia Old Person traveled from Warm Springs to meet her two daughters at the pow-wow. She said that she like how the Grand Ronde Pow-wow is so close to the beach and was



Tribal Veteran Steve Rife

looking forward to going afterwards.

"And I also came for Black Lodge," she said. "I really like the drum selections here; they all get a chance to sing. We'll probably be back again next year, especially if Black Lodge comes this way."

Virgie Tsosie drove her van for 20

He and his sister Kayla were both competing in the Teens Fancy Dance category. "Top prize is \$700, but I'm looking to get \$500."

He said that the pow-wow was a little smaller than last year, and that no, it had never rained before.

The pair is on the pow-wow trail all

summer long, driving hundreds of miles and attending a new celebration each weekend.

In other news gleaned from this year's pow-wow:

Tribal member Brad Leno is taking college courses, according to his dad, Tribal member Lonnie Leno.

Nancy Holmes reported that her husband, Tribal member Tim Holmes, spent the weekend smoking salmon and eel; and that she is busy writing a memoir about her mom's early life in a logging camp in Wisconsin, where her grandfather was foreman.

Caught at the Housing Authority booth, Holmes also noted, on a business level, that four people who had received down payment grants stopped by to say thanks.

Terri White recalled the time the family took her 95-year-old mother-in-law, Antonia White — originally from Austria, who immigrated here through Ellis Island at the age of 17 — to a pow-wow. After posing with a handsome dancer or two for a picture, she discovered that they gave her a big hug and kiss afterwards; so she started posing with every good looking dancer she could find.

Cameron Blagg III retold a reminiscence that a Yakama Tribal member told him earlier during the pow-wow. It was during an initiation some 40 years ago marking the boy-to-warrior transition. It came after the boys survived 30 days on their own in wilderness.

One of the last parts of the ceremony was to run the gauntlet allowing the women of the Tribe to give the boys one last smack before adulthood, whether with their hands or with sticks, as Blagg told it; and the Indian's friend had a club foot and couldn't make it through the gauntlet, so the Indian turned and went back to help him through; and the Medicine Man stopped the gauntlet and said that the Indian had taken enough blows, going forward and now backward, and in the end, both boys became warriors that day.

"You can read history books," said Blagg, "but to hear it from people who went through it, that's pretty cool. It keeps us alive in a small way." ■