

# Tribal Elders' Christmas Party



**Tradition of The Season** — The annual Elders' Christmas Party was held on Monday, December 19 at Spirit Mountain Casino's Bingo Hall. Tribal Elders Pearl Lyon, (top, l to r) Janet Phillips and Anna Hannan dish their plates with a meal catered by Spirit Mountain's Food and Beverage staff. Tribal Elders Kathy Provost, (right, l to r) Linda Brandon and Grand Ronde's oldest living Elder Nora Kimsey share a laugh while enjoying the delicacies.



Photos by Ron Karten

## Gathering Calls On Native Story Tellers

■ *Smoke Signals'* Editor Brent Merrill is featured.

By Ron Karten

If you haven't been getting enough stories in *Smoke Signals* lately, it may be that *Smoke Signals* Editor Brent Merrill has been saving them up for his appearance at the upcoming Northwest Indian Storytellers Gathering and Apprenticeship Workshop.

Merrill will be one of nine Native storytellers appearing at the weekend event, three each night starting on Thursday, January 5 through Saturday, January 7.

"About a year ago," said Elaine Lanegan (Siletz), Tribal liaison at NISA, "(Merrill) gave a really excellent oral history of the Tribe." They remembered his work and when this year's event came up, they turned to him again.

The event will be held at the Portland State University Native American Student and Community Center on the corner of SW Broadway and Jackson Street in Portland.

Other featured storytellers include Elaine Grinnell (Jamestown S'Klallam), Esther Stutzman (Coos & Komemba Kalapuya), storyteller and historian, and Victor Mandan (Hidatsa and Mandan).

This first for Oregon event continues the resurgence of the Native oral tradition that has faded for many in the last century. But according to Rose High Bear (DegHit'anDine), the stories do not die. High Bear is Executive Director of the Wisdom of the Elders non-profit corporation that is the umbrella organization for the Wisdom of the Elders radio programs, the Turtle Island Storytellers Network, a Native speakers bureau, and now this first annual storytellers gathering.

"Anything the Great Spirit created is never gone," she said. "It just needs to be remembered... We've

discovered that old stories come back through dreams and visions. They're very beautiful. Each one is something that comes from maybe 200 years ago, and we've discovered a quality of selflessness that we don't always hear today. These stories have a spiritual purity of somebody who lived 200 years ago."

High Bear said that her Tribe, the DegHit'anDine, has also been known as Alaskan Atajbascan, but what is less known is that the DegHit'anDine are related to the Grand Ronde people.

"The Ataibascan language is spoken by the Grand Rondes," she said.



*"Anything the Great Spirit created is never gone. It just needs to be remembered..."*

~ Rose High Bear,  
Executive Director of the Wisdom of the Elders

"Our people swept down from where we were living into

Washington and Oregon and even to California and shared the language. It stuck because young DegHit'anDine women (who married with different Tribal members along the way), were the ones in each family that passed on the language to their children."

The Wisdom of the Elders group has been developing and operating projects with the help of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts for a few years, said High Bear.

Funding for the storytelling gathering also comes from the United Indian Students in Higher Education & Native American Student & Community Center at PSU, Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest, Portland Public School's Title VII Indian Education, the Center for Columbia River History, the Mark Spencer

Hotel (which is providing an excellent weekend rate for out-of-town visitors), the Multnomah County Cultural Coalition and Umpqua Bank.

The Wisdom of the Elders Radio program has aired internationally for three years through the American Indian Radio on Satellite (Airos) Indian Network. The third year of the series was launched just a couple of weeks ago, said High Bear.

During the day on Friday, all Tribal members from Oregon, Washington and Idaho interested in storytelling, from active storytellers to those who would apprentice in the art to those just in it for other

people's stories are invited for an all-day gathering of events and learning opportunities.

"We're hoping that Grand Ronde Elders will be able to come by bus," said High Bear.

On Saturday during the day, the focus will be on the youth with a workshop for apprentices. The program will provide opportunities for young storytellers to hold court in small groups and later enjoy a workshop called "Crazy Wellness" to help them build their confidence and teach them how to speak, present, read and sense the audience.

Daytime programs on both Friday and Saturday will provide free breakfast and lunch for participants and visitors.

On Saturday evening, the last of the storytellers, including Merrill, will present.

After the stories on Friday and Saturday nights, the focus will move to fund raising. On Friday, there will be a raffle to help pay for Wisdom of the Elders projects. Items will include a Pendleton Legendary Design blanket and a number of other arts and crafts items.

On Saturday night after the stories, there will be a live and silent auction again with Pendleton blankets and jackets on the block. There will be a Spirit Mountain Community Fund gaming package for the Spirit Mountain Casino, as well as Indian crafts and getaways.

"The reason we're in existence," said High Bear, "is to bring the art of storytelling back to the Tribal communities in Oregon." In some cases, she said, people don't always know that their stories were recorded in books 100 or more years ago, including some of the Northwest Tribes.

In other cases, stories shared among Tribal bands are retold in similar ways. "Our people were always sharing, among bands," she said. "Sometimes different families tell the same tales a little differently and we get in trouble. But the stories come through other bands that have kept stories alive."

High Bear said that some Tribes looking for their old stories don't realize that neighboring Tribes have the stories. "The Yakama Nation," she said, "has a number of Cowlitz stories. Our people and stories are all interrelated."

The Wisdom of the Elders project has been growing for 15 years with the idea of preserving Native spirituality and oral traditions.

"We think our Elders are great role models, not only for Indians but for all people," said High Bear. "And we believe that the future of our people lies in restoring the rich cultural values of our ancestry." ■

<http://wisdomoftheelders.org/>