



Leadership — Executive Director for Wisdom of the Elders Rose High Bear (Deg Hit'an Dine) spearheaded the storytelling event held in Portland. "The reason we're in existence, is to bring the art of storytelling back to the Tribal communities in Oregon," said High Bear.



"We Held Up The Sky" — Esther Stutzman told her stories before an overflow crowd in the atrium of the Native American Student and Community Center. She told many stories including a legend of how Indian people asked the coyote to keep the sky from hanging too low and hurting their backs. The moral of the story was that with prayer and communication, anything can be achieved.



All Photos by Toby McClary

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of the people with the returning of these stories," said High Bear.

Warm Springs Wasco Tribal Elder Darlene Foster, who called herself "an urban Indian" because she has lived in Portland for the last 30 years, told the story of her mother's passing. She said that her mother "heard the song" and so knew that her time was near. As a daughter, Foster did not want to let her mother go, but the Sunday before her mother died, Foster herself "heard the singing, too. For me," she said, "it made saying goodbye much easier." She told her mother: "I'm not holding you back anymore."

"The creator prepared us for my mother going on," she said.

Brent Merrill (Grand Ronde, Northern Paiute) described the issues that arose in his family, including the dominant culture side pitted against the Indian side.

For Merrill, who doesn't have traditional Indian features, his childhood experiences then came face to face with Indians who questioned his Indian-ness.

It didn't stop him, however, from carrying "the pride (of his full-blooded Indian grandmother) forward with me." In 2002, Merrill and fel-

low Tribal member Steve Bobb made a 33-day walk up the Applegate Trail from Table Rock to Grand Ronde, retracing the 1856 Trail of Tears for the 325 members of some 26 Tribes that now make up the Grand Rondes.

"I felt my ancestors walk with me," he said. "I felt they carried me."

Merrill also described the problem of blood quantum in his own family. Though his great grandmother was full Indian, intermarriage meant that his grandmother was half, his mother one-quarter, he is one-eighth, and his children are one-sixteenth, the lowest blood quantum allowed for members of the Grand Ronde Tribe. That means, he said, if his children don't marry within the Tribe, their children will no longer be considered Indian.

"Are we going to let the dominant culture tell us which of us is Indian and which is not?" he asked. "We have to decide our legacy."

Storyteller Victor Mandan

"Tribal leaders were asked to shoot arrows, and where the arrows landed marked the territory that the Creator was giving to that leader's Tribe."

—Ed Edmo

(Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara) came all the way from Hill City, South Dakota to participate in the week's events. In response to Merrill's question, he quoted one of his forebears, an Indian leader

called Four Bear, in commenting on who is an Indian.

"Ask the children," Four Bear was reported to have said. "They'll tell you who they are."

Storyteller Ed Edmo set the stage for his tales by talking about

"the cold winter winds in the Gorge, quilts made by loving hands and the crackle of fire in wood stoves."

Then he talked about the deal to build a Columbia River dam and submerge Celilo Falls, Oregon's most famous Indian fishing grounds.

"A man with a gray suit, who walked like he was constipated, told us to accept his offer or we'll have the land condemned."

He talked about the "God" legends in which Tribal leaders were asked to shoot arrows, and where the arrows landed marked the territory that the Creator was giving to that leader's Tribe.

He related coyote legends, one which described why the coyote lives a solitary life and another how the porcupine gets the buffalo.

In many of his stories, Edmo provided the audience with a chorus line or hand motions that kept everyone involved in the stories.

Esther Stutzman described a traditional Indian effort to hold up the sky. She had learned the story from her grandmother, who told these stories over and over again. It was not until later, she said, that she learned that the "stories are lessons."

Robert Owens Grey Grass (Lakota) from Los Angeles led a session to teach the art of storytelling. He was trying "to break down inhibitions," said Project Director Bruce Crespin. In an effort to show a method of evoking emotion, Grey Grass asked participants to sigh in different ways.

Other storytellers, included Elaine Grinnell, (Jamestown Klallam) from Olympia, Washington; Adeline Miller (Warm Springs), and Tribal leader Allen Pinkham, Sr. (Nez Perce or Nimiipuu), from Lapwai, Idaho.

"I can really see this taking off and growing," said William

Summers (Blackfoot), partner with Siletz member Trish Butler.

"We had overwhelmingly positive comments," said High Bear. "We are already preparing for the November storytelling festival that we'll have in Portland, on the first weekend in November."

The Grand Ronde Color Guard, including Tribal Elder Gene LaBonte, Norris Merrill, Soren MacAllister and Wayne Chuclic (Alaskan Native) opened the event on Saturday. The Splac'ta Alla Drum Group (The People of the Valley) performed in the Komemba Kalapuya language

each day of the event. Four Directions Drum group, a Portland-area inter-Tribal group, performed Saturday evening.

Tribal member and Tribal Tourism Coordinator Elaine LaBonte served with a host of advisors on NISA's Advisory Council.

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Entertainment — Native Flutist and Warm Springs Tribal member James E. Greeley took a moment before the storytellers took stage to entertain the crowd with some of his most recent flute songs.



This Native Warrior statue, bronzed by Klamath/Modoc Tribal member Jim Jackson (See February 15, 2005 *Smoke Signals* article: *Klamath-Modoc Sculpture Brings Along A New Generation Of Art*), was one of four that sits in the four corners of the atrium at the Native American Student and Community Center.



Interactive — Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Elder Ed Edmo entertained the crowd of about 150 people with his articulate, yet humorous tales. Edmo involved the crowd asking that they used hand signals and sounds that corresponded with his many stories. Of the many legends told by Edmo, he spoke of the cold winter winds in the Columbia Gorge as well as fishing at Celilo Falls. Each of Edmo's stories ended with an abrupt "thank you" which led to an eruption of applause. "Nobody knows where they began," said Edmo, "but stories are there to tell us how to act in the future. What we hear we have to put back on the wind for others."