

2006 Youth Leadership Conference:



Impact!

"Listen" — The message from Howard Rainer was to get involved. "The bottom line," he said, "is don't be average. Be awesome. Take no prisoners." The word from those involved was that the students took the message to heart. They helped plan the event and participated in it.

All photos by Toby McClary

■ Grand Ronde, Siletz and Chemawa Indian School youth pull together for "their" time.

By Ron Karten

"The time has come," said Howard Rainer (Taos Pueblo/Creek), "to be seen and heard as a Native American." Grand Ronde, Siletz and Chemawa students were among those whose time had come.

"Establishing relationships with Indians from other Tribes," said Tribal Youth Education Supervisor Marie Heimburg after the conference, "makes it more likely that the Tribes will work together in the future."

In introducing Rainer, Heimburg told the students, "One day you will be in charge and right now, you are making the important relationships."

Heimburg used to call the Tribal youth "the future." Today, she calls them "the present."

Rainer and Heimburg, along with Jillian Joseph and Chance Rush spoke before a group of high school Indians, grades 8-12, who converged on the Grand Ronde gymnasium at the end of April for the Third Annual Native Youth Leadership Conference.

Just before lunch on Thursday, April 27, Rainer was preparing about twenty student leaders to put together, with their groups, a 20-minute presentation for all the others. Eighth grader Joey Holmes (Athabaskan), son of Tribal member Tim Holmes and wife Nancy, was among those leaders.

He was also among a group of Siletz and Grand Ronde youth who have been working on this conference since last November.

"We learned to work together as a group instead of two groups. We

"Kids help in the planning of the conference throughout the year," said Heimburg. "So they have a buy in for its success. In that process of planning, they're learning numerous skills but we're emphasizing the

they would use."

When the program took place that evening, more than 100 from the Tribe and the community turned out to support the kids.

"You are the leaders," Rainer told his group of leaders before sending them off to lunch earlier that day. "You will make it happen. You are to move your group. You are to move them. You will have people who don't want to do it but it will be your responsibility to make sure that everyone will make some contribution. The time has come to be seen and heard as a Native American."

"There's pressure on you guys," he continued, "but you can handle it. Pressure is good. It demands performance."

The rest of the teams were next door, out behind the Youth Education facility already eating lunch. "I know you're hungry," said Rainer, "but leaders have to sacrifice."

At first sight, Rainer is an unassuming presence, dressed simply with hair going gray. When he shows the way to walk, though, his body springs to life and he moves with purpose. When he asks, "Who's number one?" there is no question that everybody ought to think they are.

"The bottom line," he said, "is don't be average. Be awesome. Take no prisoners."

With 30 years behind him as a motivational speaker, Rainer gave *Smoke Signals* an interview when



Standing Tall And Stretching Fingers — Students from Grand Ronde, Siletz and the Chemawa Indian School worked their magic on Thursday night, April 27, when each group presented 20-minute pieces to all the rest of the Leadership Conference.

planned this. It took about four meetings to plan the whole conference," he said.

"At first," he said, "us and Siletz had different views on things, like names of things or projects. I guess we like bonded so in the end it was easy."

leadership."

"The kids did awesome," said Tribal Youth Education Culture Specialist Travis Stewart. "You could really see that they were taking ownership of it. It seemed like pretty much across the board, they definitely learned something from it and learned something



Grand Ronde, Siletz, Chemawa Indian School students and staff pose for a group photo.