

Lane Community College Longhouse Breaks Ground

■ Ten years and \$800,000 in the bank leaves about \$300,000 still to go.

By Ron Karten

Lane Community College (LCC) President Mary Spilde called it "Phase One of a long-held dream."

LCC Native American Student Programs Coordinator James Florendo, before joining with his brother, Brent Florendo and Southern Oregon University Native American Studies Program Director David West for the opening song, said that this would be "the first of many" Grand Entry songs.

Wednesday, June 21, was a beautiful, sunny, breezy day when more than 100 joined together at the top of a hill high above the school's running

of Education committed \$250,000 from the college's Capital Repair and Improvement Fund to the longhouse, and though today the college is reducing its operating budget and laying off staff, the commitment to the longhouse stands. "We are following through on our promises," said college President Mary Spilde.

"The dream is finally coming through," said Sandin Riddle, Native American Student Association President.

"I'm hoping we get the same love and respect that they get at the University of Oregon," said Happi Matthews, LCC Student Body President.

Between the efforts of LCC students, faculty, administration, community and Tribes, Emcee James Florendo said, "It's truly a community project."

This will be the first longhouse built at an American Community College not affiliated with a Tribe, said Roger Hall, LCC Board of Education Chair. "I hope and believe that this house will become hallowed ground," he said.

For Grand Ronde Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy, an important part of the longhouse is the sense of sovereignty that it will promote. Often in her travels, she said, she encounters people who "are just amazed that Native Americans are still alive and thriving. And students are just as amazed," she said. Again and again, however, she has seen how places that promote talk about Indian culture, also promote a vital respect for Indian sovereignty.

According to the site plan, the design of the longhouse "will reflect a symbiosis of traditional

and contemporary construction methods, with materials that are derived from Mother Earth. Situated on a prominent site with axial relations to the cardinal directions, the building will provide a landmark for the campus and be a gateway introduction for visitors to the campus. With the major ceremonial entry facing east, a story telling and teaching circle adjacent to the building will be encompassed by carved cedar totems, honoring the armed forces of the United States. Entries, both east and west, will lead to a circular Hall of Honor, a place to honor the nine Tribes of Oregon. The Hall



Celebration — Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy shares a laugh with Southern Oregon University Native American Studies Program Director David West as Frank Merrill, a driving force behind the longhouse effort, looks on.

of Honor will be an interpretation of a pit house or Hogan with the light source radiating from above through timber framing. Neighboring the Hall, the Longhouse Room will be of traditional propor-

ning to move its Health and Wellness program, and others as well, to LCC in the near future.

"I think it's important to have a Native presence on campus," said Tribal member David Lewis,

"I hope and believe that this house will become hallowed ground."

~ Roger Hall,
LCC Board of Education Chair

tions and structure, representing a place that had familial, sacred and traditional modes. It will be a place of gathering on the college grounds. The "smoke hole" above will provide light to the room and longhouse roof will reflect the patterns of the sky."

"We're completing the circle and acknowledging the part that Native Americans played," said Anderson. "It's a perfect place now and for the future."

For Tribal member John Chantell, Tribal Services Representative of the Tribe's Eugene Satellite office, the groundbreaking was a homecoming. "I was here for four years," he said. "It's like a family reunion."

And, he added, the Tribe is plan-

a Ph.D. candidate at the nearby University of Oregon (UO). "These kind of things start Native Studies programs."

When UO's Longhouse caretaker Gordon Bettles sang to ready the group for the actual groundbreaking, he said, "You gotta sing and you gotta dig with a good heart."

Nick Sixkiller, a Siletz Education Specialist, follows nine Siletz students currently attending LCC. He sees in the future longhouse a "comfortable setting to focus on school work, a place for sharing culture and heritage with other Tribes and non-Indians who will better understand Indian culture as a result."

"It should be open to all, and at the same time, it should encourage



New Ground — Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy helped out with the ground breaking at the Lane County Community College held on Wednesday, June 21.

track and looking across the countryside to Mt. Pischo, "where Native Americans gathered," according to Janet Anderson, Director of the LCC Foundation.

The day has been more than 13 years in coming, since Frank Merrill first floated the idea. Merrill and others representing the dream have been pitching it and securing funding at countless gatherings since. The \$1.1 million needed has been slow in coming, as is often the case, but the effort has been relentless in all the years. In fact, this groundbreaking comes partly on the great confidence supporters have in the on-going effort, because the project remains \$300,000 from its goal. It also rides in on the generosity of LCC students who have committed to a three-year, \$3/term assessment to the project, anticipating an additional contribution of \$250,000 to \$300,000.

The Spirit Mountain Community Fund contributed \$100,000 to the project.

In 1995, the Lane County Board



"Thank You For Being Here" — LCC Native American Student Programs Coordinator James Florendo (at the podium) welcomes over 100 people to the ground breaking ceremony on the Lane Community College Campus in Eugene.

Photos by Justin Phillips