

Faces Of Pride — Siletz Tribal Elder Gilbert Towner (below) and Yakama Warriors' Society member Gil Calac (right in headdress) were present at this year's Veterans' Pow-wow held in Grand Ronde, July 7-9. Nearly 20 flags (below right) were presented during the posting of the colors on Saturday, July 8.



Photo by Brent Merrill



Photo by Toby McClary

Photo by Brent Merrill

Veterans Gather In Grand Ronde For Annual Pow-wow

■ Men and women of service honored by Tribal families.

By Ron Karten

Over the weekend, as many as 300 Veterans came to Grand Ronde for the 2006 Veterans' Pow-wow held on the weekend of July 7-9.

As always, Vets converged on Grand Ronde from all over. Ten came from the Ira Hayes American Legion Post in Arizona, said Gene LaBonte.

"Gene gifted them with Tribal gold pins," said Gene's wife Billie.

The Yakama Warriors Honor Guard were on hand with eight eagle staffs and two war bonnets.

World War II Vets were there. Korean War Vets were there. Vietnam War Vets were there. And Iraqi War Vets, representing both Iraqi wars, were there.

It was a hot weekend.

"When we set up we were in the shade," said Community Elder LaVerne Hosford, 82, looking up, even through the top of her vendor's stall, into the unrelenting sun.

For the record, the weekend brought on one case of heat stroke, two of heat exhaustion and required one band aid for a cut finger. The Spirit Mountain Casino provided ice, water and all kinds of refreshments for the Elders.

Marshall Tall Eagle "guestimated" that he had given out 275 Medals of Valor to Veterans at the event.

For Saturday night dinner, the Tribe through the Veterans' Honor Guard hosted about 800 people for a chicken barbeque.

The next morning, the Tribe hosted a biscuits and gravy breakfast for the pow-wow community.

Native Dan Rupe, a Veterans officer, presented the Tribe with a map drawn in the early 1800s that was used for getting the Tribes restored

more than a century later, as well as a metal casting of an eagle and the flag, and a shell necklace on which you can see an eagle's face.

"Another Vet," said Billie LaBonte, "stopped Gene and said, 'You have done more for me in the last hour than the U.S. government has done for me in the last 32 years.'"

Though some vendors expressed disappointment with sales, many said they were doing very well, and others were on hand as Veterans in appreciation of the venue.

Navy Vietnam Veteran Danny Olinger of Carlton was once honored by the Tribe for his service. "It's a great great honor to be here," he said. "I'd support this pow-wow anytime. It's an awesome pow-wow. The Vets couldn't ask for anything but this."

"We were treated like royalty," said Bud and Cecilia Hegleaiup from Dorena, Oregon, who have been vendors at pow-wows for 25 years. "You need a sign? Here it is," said Bud, quoting pow-wow staff. "We were treated real well. And with a six-seven hour setup, it makes life so much easier for us."

Everyone was helpful, said Billie. She made special note of Tribal member Bobby Mercier, who jumped in unasked to help bring

cases of water to the Elders.

Gilbert Towner (Siletz), also known as Zeke, wrote after the event: "I've been to a lot of Veteran doings — but none of them compared to the 'Grand Round' Vets Pow-wow."



Tribal Council member & Veteran Reyn Leno

Photo by Brent Merrill

"Everybody seemed to be in the right place at the right time," said Gene.

The wind came out on Sunday and the flags at the West Valley

Veterans' Memorial were flapping toward the east.

They flapped for Veterans past and present, for those who served and those who died serving, and this weekend, they flapped for Siletz Tribal Elder Gerald Lafferty, who passed on Saturday at his home in Siletz. He was 75. Lafferty was brother to Grand Ronde Tribal Elders Norma Lee, Kenneth Lafferty, Margaret McAbee and Juanita Lee.

"That leaves only four of us," said Norma Lee, whose siblings originally numbered nine.

"When he was young," said Tribal Elder Val Grout, who was walking at the pow-wow with Norma, "he used to run around with my husband and I."

"I did all my crying this morning," said Norma. "Now, I have to be around people."

Tribal Elder Bob Tom and Navy Vet Nick Sixkiller (Cherokee) shared emcee duties. Victor Fry (Chetco) served as Whip Man. His wife, Johonna (Shoshone), was Head Woman Dancer. Tribal member Deitz Peters served as Head Man Dancer. David West (Potawatomi), now living in Grants Pass, was Spiritual Man. Tribal member Miranda Provost was Royalty Queen. Tribal member Peter Nelson was Young Warrior. And four-year-old Ebony Provost was Honorary Princess. Volunteer Barbi Parker sang the National Anthem on Saturday.

Tribal Elder Marce Norwest, who with his wife, Sharon, handed over the job of organizing the Vets Pow-wow to Gene and Billie LaBonte two years ago, said he was well pleased with the job his successors were doing. ■