

## Tribal Youth Leadership Conference Focuses On Healthy Relationships

LEADERSHIP continued  
from front page

held presentations to reflect on ideas about what makes a relationship healthy.

"I basically had to repress everything I learned that summer at *Smoke Signals*, said Tribal member Joseph Ham, who interned last summer with *Smoke Signals*.

On a more serious note, his older brother Jack Ham, also a former intern with *Smoke Signals*, said that the program helped him "learn some important values. It helped me listen better," he said, "and to learn how to work with other people, how to be a better leader, to take charge."

"The hardest thing I learned is to take charge," said Joe Ham, "because you don't want to be too dominating."

Between Tribal youth and chaperones, the conference brought nearly 100 to the Tribal gymnasium.

Snohomish Tribe Chair Mike Evans called "connection with other communities" the big value of this annual event. "Our family has now become the whole Northwest."

"For my girls," said Sonya Tetnowski, chaperone for Makah girls, "it's the traditional ways of respect: for each other, for the community, for Elders, for the family, but for themselves, mostly."

In one session, groups of high school aged girls told the guys what they'd like to see in them: "show respect," "be outgoing" and "be responsible."

When the tables turned, the guys preferences for the girls included "having similar interests," "don't lie or hide things," along with "be respectful" and "responsible."

"Honor her or thank her," said Joey Holmes (Athabaskan). "She's like your mother or girlfriend."

"They're saying the right things, and that's the start," said Evans.

"We're trying to have young people make a connection between heads and hearts," said Tribal member Travis Mercier, Youth Education Cultural Specialist and coordinator of the event, "and take that to a deeper level. To make positive choices and decisions. We're bombarded with negative images so we have to meet often to counter them."

He called the conference "a contemporary way of gathering, like our ancestors did, to trade, to compete, to play games."

It's about "living the warrior spirit," he said. "Be positive, productive and pro-active. We want young people to go and make a difference." ■



Members of the Siletz Tribal youth (above) performed their traditional Feather Dance as part of the opening night of this year's Leadership Conference held at the Tribe's education complex on Thursday, April 12. Grand Ronde Tribal youth (below) performed a Canoe Family song and dance. The Leadership Conference went from April 12-14 and included activities such as healthy relationship workshops, community presentations, and a basketball tournament.



Photos by Toby McClary

# The Road To Self-Sufficiency

■ Housing's Deborah Kroeker makes this her mission.

By Ron Karten

Skukum-tamtam mamuk is Chinook Wawa for "Strengthen your heart." It is the idea behind a Tribal Housing program aimed at strengthening the housing program's weakest link.

This link is the place where local, state and federal safety nets all seem to fray.

"Part of self-sufficiency is stability," said Tribal Housing Services Specialist Deborah Kroeker in the Housing Authority boardroom on Tuesday night, March 19. "It is typical that as a family starts getting ahead, government support drops off, and then something happens, maybe the family car breaks down. And a whole spiral of things follows from that."

She ran through a litany of other possibilities. A child gets sick and the parent misses one day of work. Then one child gets better and another gets sick. Then, taking into account the sick days, there is not enough money left when the car breaks down. Or there's not enough money when the rent comes due.

"We're trying to help people get through, but the problem with the system is that benefits diminish as recipients make progress. And this is where people give up."

Federally funded Individual Development Accounts (IDA) can provide "that stability piece," said Kroeker.

"The next step after stability is the ability to plan for the future."

Kroeker accesses money to fight these problems from the federal Department of Housing and Urban

The last meeting, despite a fine spaghetti dinner as enticement, drew only Tribal member Kalene Contreras.

"I've been to every meeting," she



Tribal Housing Services Specialist Deborah Kroeker

Development (HUD)'s self-sufficiency programs.

"HUD is really working hard to solve this," said Kroeker. And the agency has been developing programs to fill the gaps in the safety net since the early 1990s, said Kroeker.

Monthly, she describes the possibilities to an ad hoc group called the Self-Sufficiency Advisory Committee, a group with as many as nine Tribal members.

said, "because I want to help, and I want to be an example."

"It doesn't always work right away," said Kroeker, referring to the effort to bring the information to all who need it. "Contact can be made many times before it is effective."

On the other hand, "the (Housing) Board doesn't like the idea of just giving people money," said Kroeker. Hence this class, and others like it.

"I think it's awesome that the Tribe says, 'We'll help you if you're helping yourself.'"

One aspect of these self-sufficiency programs, said Kroeker, is that pieces of it are distributed throughout many departments. The Social Services program has a piece. Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Training sections each receive funding for self-sufficiency programs.

One of the next challenges for Kroeker is to find ways to enable all of the pieces to work together. They've talked about putting together a resource directory, understanding that these programs change frequently, and any effort at maintaining a resource directory would have to be updated regularly. One place to maintain that directory might be the Tribal website.

The group will establish a talking circle and create an atmosphere that builds self-esteem. Among other issues that need attention are: more accessible and affordable day care, effective communications, simplified job descriptions, and encouragement to applicants who may not have been through the process successfully before.

More recently, Kroeker led a financial skills seminar for Tribal members. Both are on-going educational efforts. ■

Photo by Ron Karten