

Vendors Serve Up Pow-wow Chow

■ Fry bread, Indian tacos prove popular dishes

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

With a growing line of famished pow-wow attendees standing before her fry bread tent on Saturday afternoon, Joanne Beeks (Navajo) of Grand Ronde pulls a handful of dough out of a small refrigerator and quickly starts punching holes in it with her thumb as she twirls it into an acceptably round shape.

"The holes make it float around and turn out fluffy," Beeks says, barely looking up to answer a question.

Beeks hands the perforated dough to employee Bea Belan, who carefully drops it into a vat of hot oil for about 30 seconds.

After the flour has burgeoned into fry bread, Belan gingerly extracts it from the oil and passes it upfront, where hungry pow-wowers top it with beans and ground beef. Others farther back in line jealously crane their necks for a mouth-watering peek, having worked up an appetite watching the calorie-consuming dancing.

Beeks, who has cooked at the Pow-wow for the last six years and says Tribal members probably know her as "the burrito lady," says she used up a 50-pound bag of flour on Friday, the opening night of the 2007 Pow-wow, and would probably cook through a 100-pound bag on Saturday. She estimates she and her hired help – Beeks used to work Pow-wow with family as-

sistance, but everyone has moved away – would cook more than 200 fry breads on Saturday.

"It's going to be a long day," Beeks adds while twirling yet another soon-to-be fry bread.

She was right.

Beeks' fry bread stand was one of 16 food vendors, five of whom offered Indian tacos and fry bread for sale, who helped keep both participants and audience members fed during the three-day event, held Aug. 17-19 at the Grand Ronde Tribal campus.

In addition to fry bread and Indian tacos, people munched on elephant ears, pizza, kettle korn, and barbecued ribs, chicken and sausage, as well as soothing their palates with \$1 ice cream bars.

For John Florent, the 2007 Pow-wow was yet another event in a long list over the last eight years that he's attended with his giant kettle korn-making drum. He says he invested about \$30,000 to get his kettle korn operation popping.

"I had a friend in Fresno who was the biggest operator in California," Florent says about getting into the sticky situation.

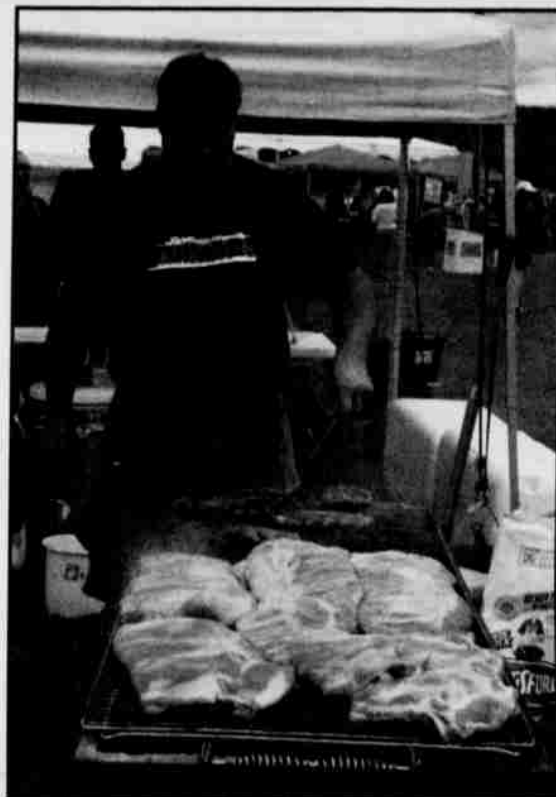
Florent attended the 2006 Pow-wow and returned for this year's event because of that positive experience.

Although Friday night started slow, Florent says, Saturday's sales were making up for the sluggish start. And Florent was already looking forward to the future.

"Two weeks from today I'll be at Autzen Stadium," Florent says while scooping kettle korn into a plastic bag for Crystal Lester of



Above, Thomas Ainsworth, left, and Ed Simper enjoy an Indian taco during the 2007 Grand Ronde Contest Pow-wow. Right, Todd Barker of McMinnville turns slabs of ribs.



Tualatin. "I've done every Duck game since 2002."

Meanwhile, amidst swirling, aromatic smoke wafting up from two rectangular grills behind the barbecue tent, Todd Barker of McMinnville turns slabs of ribs, chicken and sausages over the fire.

"This is our first time at Pow-wow," Barker says. "My sister works at the (Spirit Mountain) Casino, and she suggested it. I'm glad she did. It's a great event."

Barker was using the Pow-wow, like he has other festivals and events this summer, as another opportunity to promote his Barker-Q barbecue sauce, which he created 25 years ago but has only been actively marketing for the last 18 months. The sauce is available locally at such outlets as Roth's grocery store in McMinnville.

Considering the consistently long lines at the barbecue tent on Saturday, Barker's peppery, but not too spicy, sauce might already have a few more loyal customers.

As the afternoon wore on, the popularity of Indian tacos and fry bread proved frustrating for some

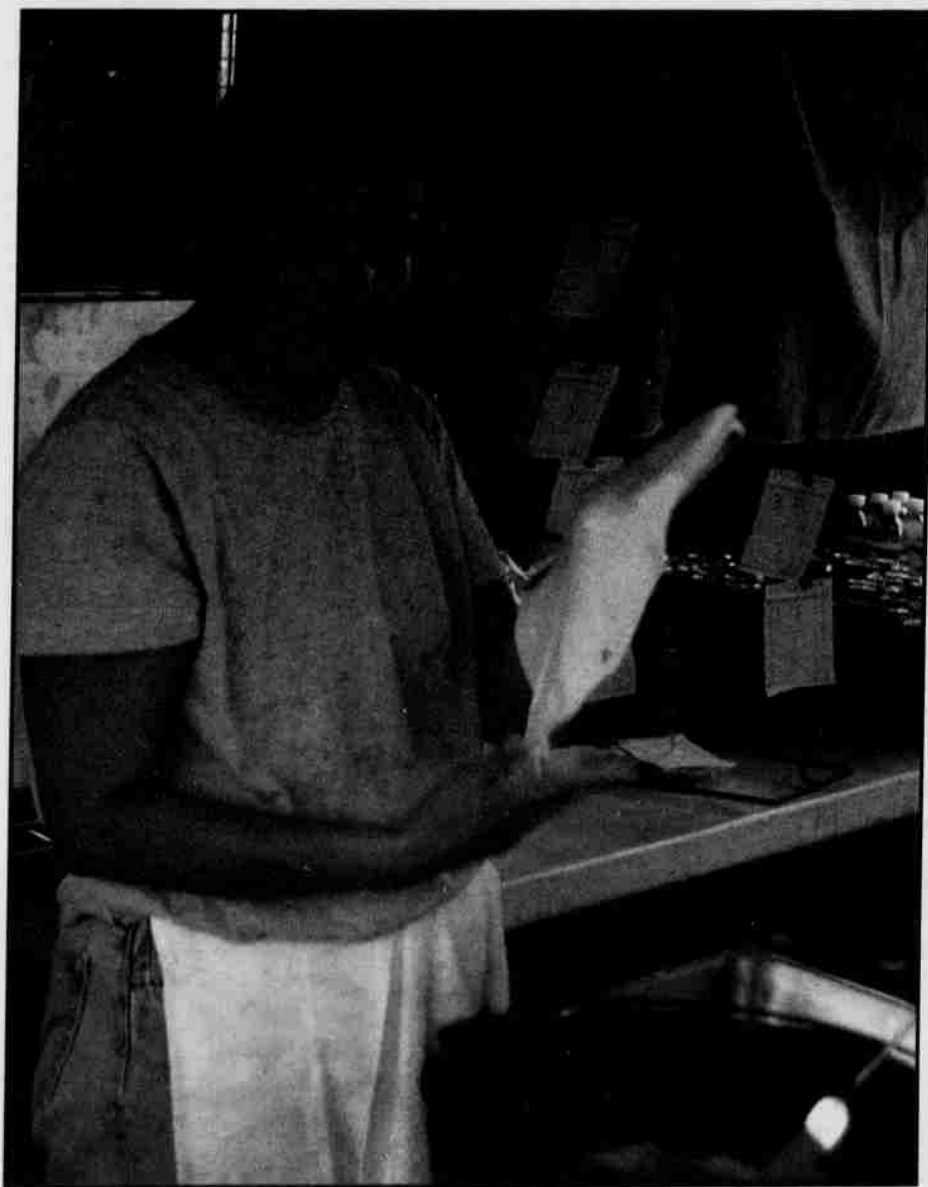
hungry Pow-wow attendees. The lines were long and at least one vendor ran out of supplies to make fry bread, disappointing those waiting to place an order.

But Ed Simper and his friend, Thomas Ainsworth, were among the lucky fry bread aficionados, standing between vendors' row and the Pow-wow tent, munching on \$6 Indian tacos from Claudia's Indian Tacos.

"They're the best on-site," Simper said in between bites.

"Claudia (Leno, Grand Ronde) always has the best," Ainsworth added after swallowing a mouthful. "It's well worth it."

For those unable to get their favorite Pow-wow meal, the Tribe provided another option. Between 4:30 and 6:30 p.m. Saturday, volunteers served a salmon dinner with all the fixings – rice, corn, biscuits, cookies and juice – to attendees and participants. ■



Left, Joanne Beeks prepares dough before it is dropped into a vat of oil and becomes fry bread. Right, the Tribe served salmon dinner on Saturday evening during the Pow-wow.



Photos by Dean Rhodes