

Grand Ronde feet help Nike design new shoe aimed at Native soles

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

If the new Nike Air Native N7 fits Native American feet, it's partly because Grand Ronde Tribal members volunteered to be measured and try on prototypes.

Beaverton-based Nike unveiled its Air Native N7 in late September. The shoe is designed for Native Americans and company representatives visited the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde campus several times, including in June 2006, to measure Tribal feet and test designs.

Sam McCracken, manager of Nike's Native American Business Program, said it took almost two years of research, development and fit testing to create a shoe designed for the Native American foot.

Air Native N7 researchers measured more than 200 people, or 400 feet, from more than 70 Tribes, as well as contacted podiatrists and members of Indian Health Services and the National Indian Health Board.

In general, Nike found that American Indians have a much wider and taller foot than the average shoe accommodates. The average shoe width of Native men and women measured was three width sizes larger than the standard Nike shoe.

As a result, the Air Native N7 is wider with a larger toe box. The shoe also has fewer seams that might cause irritation and a thicker sock liner for comfort.

In June 2006, Confederated Tribes Member Benefits Specialist Reina Nelson and Human Resources Specialist Cindy Watkins lent their toes, arches and soles to help Nike develop its shoe.

"The pair that fit me best was comfortable and had good arch sup-

port," Nelson recalls.

"There were definitely differences in the shoes we tried on as far as width, comfort, arch height and support," Watkins said. "If Native feet are different than other feet, it is a great idea to have a shoe designed specifically to address the differences."

Profits from Air Native N7 will support Nike's "Let Me Play" programs on Native American lands. The program builds play surfaces and provides grants and product donations to encourage Native youth to participate in sports.

McCracken said the Air Native N7 is designed to address health and wellness issues existing within Native American communities, such as diabetes, that are caused by inactivity and obesity.

By providing a shoe that caters to Native American feet, the hope is it will motivate Natives to lead more physically active lifestyles that will improve their health, he said.

"Nike is aware of the growing health issues facing Native Americans," McCracken said. "Through the Nike Air Native N7, we are stepping up our commitment to ... elevate the issue of Native American health and wellness."

"We believe physical activity can and should be a fundamental part of the health and wellness of all Native Americans."

Special comfort characteristics of the Air Native N7 include reduced seams and layering, and use of performance foams at key points to provide additional cushioning.

"In combination, these elements help to improve overall fit and help wearers avoid foot irritations caused by ill-fitting footwear," Nike said in a press release.

The shoe design also features several "heritage callouts," such as sunrise to sunset to sunrise patterns on the tongue and heel of the shoe. Feather designs adorn the inside and stars are on the sole to represent the night sky.

"The fact that Nike, a globally known company, has created a shoe specifically for Native people shows they are paying attention to our diverse needs," Nelson said.

"Nike could have selected a much larger population base, but they chose ours. They chose for humanity rather than for profit. That's awesome in today's shoe market, and, yes, I am definitely going to buy a pair."

"If these special shoes get more people up and moving towards healthier lifestyles, that's excellent," Watkins said.

The shoe is available through Nike's Native Business Program.

Tribal wellness programs and Tribal schools nationwide will be able to purchase a pair at the wholesale price of \$42.80 and then pass it along to individuals, often at no profit.

For example, the Lummi Tribe in Bellingham, Wash., is offering a pair for \$13.20 when Tribal mem-



Photo by Toby McClary

From left, Member Benefits Specialist Reina Nelson and Human Resources Specialist Cindy Watkins lent their toes, arches and soles to help Nike develop its shoe in June 2006.

bers complete 26 miles of activity between Oct. 15 and Nov. 15, or less than 1 mile per day in a month.

Nike anticipates selling at least 10,000 pairs and raising \$200,000 for Tribal sports programs.

Includes information from *The Associated Press*. ■

Willamina High School Hosts Canoe Family



Photos by Toby McClary

On Thursday, Sept. 27, the Grand Ronde/Chinook Canoe Family put on a presentation during a Willamina High School assembly. Above, Willamina High School Principal Tim France received a blanket as a gift from the Canoe Family.