

Tribal members stand out at conference

Wood, Lewis and Thorsgard present papers at annual national ethnohistory meeting at U of O

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Grand Ronde Tribal members played a big part in the 2008 annual meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory.

The three-day conference, sponsored by the University of Oregon and held at the Eugene Hilton and the university's Many Nations Longhouse, included talks by Tribal members David Lewis, Eirik Thorsgard and Stephanie Wood.

Lewis and Wood are University of Oregon students and Thorsgard graduated from Oregon State University. Lewis is department manager of the Tribe's Cultural Resources Department and Thorsgard is Cultural Protection coordinator for the department.

Photography in the conference program also highlighted the Grand Ronde Tribe with cover photos of the John and Hattie Sands-Hudson's family, and a *Smoke Signals* photo of Wood and Lewis identifying and documenting western Oregon Native baskets.

Wood and Lewis were featured in the June 15 issue of *Smoke Signals* in an article describing Wood's work with western Oregon Native baskets at the university's Museum of Natural and Cultural History.

"It is important for each basket to tell its story," Wood told an audience that fluctuated between 25 to 50 attendees at the longhouse. "The baskets are full of valuable information that should be shared with others. It's like a family telling their stories."

"A basket can tell you if the weaver wove right- or left-handed, as well as what region she was from, just by the materials that were available to her. The materi-



Photo by Ron Karten

Tribal member Stephanie Wood, center, presented her work at the American Society of Ethnohistory meeting held at the University of Oregon. She is seen here with University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History's Pam Endzweig, Director of Collections, and Elizabeth Kallenbach.

als used also give us an idea of the social status of the weaver."

In preparation for her first public presentation, Wood said she "didn't sleep for two days straight."

Lewis's presentation, "Termination of Western Oregon Indians: Economics, Politics, and Oral Histories," described how in the 1950s the Bureau of Indian Affairs sold Congress with the observation that "Tribal members exhibit support for Termination."

"It's not necessary to contact the Indians," the BIA superintendent of Indian Affairs reportedly said. "They've agreed in principle."

The comment stuck, Lewis said, in part because Indians were too poor to travel to Washington, D.C., and say it wasn't so.

"There is no evidence that Tribes wanted to be terminated," Lewis

said.

Thorsgard presented a paper titled "Indigenous Concepts of Creation Stories."

One creation story takes place in what has become Oregon City: Coyote made a salmon trap so well that it caught salmon faster than Coyote could prepare them to be eaten. Coyote complained that the salmon trap was insulted and would stop catching salmon altogether.

"Now people who want salmon have a lot to be doing," the story goes. "It is like that for all time now, because of what Coyote did a long time ago."

"At least three different versions are used in Grand Ronde today," Thorsgard told the group.

"Overall what can be gained by re-analyzing early literature from missionaries, settlers, linguists and

ethnographers is a more refined understanding of the landscape," he said.

"The area where a community has spent its existence is vitally important to their concept of self. When we start to look at the available literature, we start to see a mosaic of spiritually and culturally important areas that are just as important today as they were in the past."

For Wood, the result is similar: "I feel that it is important for the baskets to have a name and a face to go with them. It is important to give recognition to the weaver. By doing this their descendants can then come into the museum and be able to look at their family's baskets and help learn and understand their family's history."

From across the United States, Canada and Central America, more than 300 attendees representing a range of academic specialties traveled in mid-November to Eugene to "look beyond Euro-central views of history," as Professor Lynn Stephen said. She is chair of the university's Department of Anthropology.

About one-third of the scholars attending were themselves indigenous, according to organizer Brian Klopotek, Assistant Professor of Ethnic Studies.

One of the goals of the conference, Thorsgard said, "is to get past defining ourselves in relation to colonialists."

In addition, he said that another goal is "redefining continuity," so that indigenous people are "not descendants, but inheritors" of a culture.

Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom attended in support of Tribal members. ■

Plankhouse blessing



Photos by Dean Rhodes

At right, contractor David Rogers guides the first side beam of the Grand Ronde plankhouse at Uyxat Powwow Grounds into place on Dec. 4 after a blessing ceremony was performed by the Grand Ronde Drum Group and led by Tribal member and Cultural Resources Protection Coordinator Eirik Thorsgard. "This is the first house the Grand Ronde have built like this in a long time," Thorsgard said. Watching Rogers guide the beam are contractors Kurt Overholt, middle, and Joe Herrie. Above, Tribal member Leonard Logan touches the beam immediately after Tribal descendant Alex Busby. 6. Tribal members working full time on the plankhouse building project are Rusty Leno and Kevin Contreras, said Tribal Mentorship and Workforce Development Coordinator Denise Harvey.

