

# Tribe participates as Arch Bridge closes

By Ron Karten

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

The celebration marking the restoration of Arch Bridge between Oregon City and West Linn brought together the area's indigenous past with plans for a revitalized future.

The arch-type bridge, opened in 1923 and named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2005, spans the Willamette River and is just downriver from Willamette Falls, a traditional fishing center where the Grand Ronde Tribe and its precursors, as Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said in welcoming people to the celebration, have long invited other Tribes in the area to take part in fishing and trade.

Other parts of the renewal are also proceeding in Oregon City and West Linn where the focus is on surveying and revitalizing each city's main street.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde is among 14 Oregon cities, counties, state departments and local businesses in the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition. The effort is supported by Oregon's 5th District Congressman Kurt Schrader.

Kennedy welcomed more than 700 people to the celebration on Saturday, Jan. 15. Folks from the neighborhoods and partner organizations crowded the structure, huddled under canopies to escape a steady rain. They sampled smoked salmon, nuts and berries provided by the Tribe.

Tribal member Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach told the crowd that he wanted them to "put your hearts together for this bridge" and, following a prayer, played blessing



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

**Tribal Elder Debi Bernando makes a cedar bark bracelet as she sings along with the Grand Ronde Canoe Family as they perform during the event celebrating the Arch Bridge, which links Oregon City and West Linn over the Willamette River, on Saturday, Jan. 15. The bridge, which the event took place on, closed on Jan. 15 for a restoration that is expected to take two years.**

songs.

Tribal member Eirik Thorsgard told an Indian story about how the falls were created by a communication breakdown between Coyote and Meadowlark.

"Coyote wanted to build it in Salem," Thorsgard said, "but he couldn't communicate that to Meadowlark," and it wound up in West Linn/Oregon City area.

The Grand Ronde Canoe Family – including Tribal members Travis Mercier and Brian Krehbiel, and Richard Sohapp (Yakama) on the drums, along with Tribal members Tiffany Tonso, Zoey Holsclaw and Selena Ulestad – all found space outside the canopies and were singing in the rain. Tribal member

and Cultural Resources Department Manager David Lewis, in addition to his coordinating duties, kindly held an umbrella over the group.

Tribal member Debi Bernando demonstrated the traditional way of making cedar bark bracelets.

Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor and Tribal Attorney Rob Greene were on hand. Taylor handled questions about the Tribe's ceded lands with maps and other information. Taylor and Greene also focused on the heritage area effort.

There are only a couple dozen areas so named across the country and most are in the East, said Taylor.

The bridge was designed by state Engineer Conde B. McCullough, the brains behind more than 30 picturesque coastal bridges in the state. It is distinctive for its roadway

built halfway up the arch, rather than above or below as with most arch bridges, according to an Oregon Department of Transportation handout.

"You can tell the designer put his heart and soul into this bridge," said Rich Keene, Department of Transportation project manager for the restoration. After four years of preparation for the renovation, "This is our moment of glory," he said.

"It was so well built," said Jody Carson, West Linn's City Council president, "that no major work has been needed on the structure (since it was built)."

Visitors to the celebration included Chris Davis, a retired Oregon City cement mason who worked on many bridges during his career, and had a professional interest in this work.

"Most bridges today are quick and uncomplicated," he said. "These details used to be done with man-

power. Today, it's all big equipment. But when you're looking at repairs for 400 bridges (as ODOT does today), it's a different job."

The bridge is expected to be closed until late 2012. In the meantime, a free shuttle service will be available for bicyclists and pedestrians, with a detour along McLoughlin Boulevard and Interstate 205 designated for cars and trucks.

The \$10.6 million project will be funded almost 90 percent with federal funds and a little more than 10 percent state funds. In addition, the state Department of Transportation has come up with \$1.5 million to help the local areas with revitalization and hope to add another \$900,000 to the effort.

For more information about the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition, go to the Web site at [www.wfheritage.org](http://www.wfheritage.org). ■



**Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker fixes her granddaughter Tribal descendant Azreyuh Guzman's regalia before they mingle at the event celebrating the Arch Bridge in Oregon City on Saturday, Jan. 15.**



**Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy speaks to the crowd of hundreds in attendance at the event celebrating the Arch Bridge, which links Oregon City and West Linn over the Willamette River, on Saturday, Jan. 15.**