First Foods celebration draws more than 50

By Ron Karten
Smoke Signals staff writer

The foods were on the table to be honored, the way Tribal Elder and Culture Committee member Carol Logan said they should be served.

The menu included fresh caught, wild salmon, clam chowder, crab legs, huckleberries from Indian Heaven on Mt. Adams, wild rice from the Great Lakes area, harvested by members of the Onishanabe Nation, with golden chanterelle mushrooms, camas baked with ceremonial deer meat, boiled lamprey, ceremonial elk stew and fry bread.

"You have people sit down and their food is there," Logan said. "Honoring the food, letting people sit down, taking the time to feel good and respecting the food the way it needs to be respected."

That was the first lesson taught at the First Foods Celebration held Saturday, March 19, in the Tribal Community Center, which drew more than 50 attendees this year.

"Lining up for food is what we learned in the Depression," said Logan. "We don't want to look at our food that way."

She started the ceremony with thanks for each food and asked that everybody start their meal with water.

"Our sacred water which gives life to all living things," she said.

"Tribal people need to understand that it's important to pray for their food," said Tribal Elder and Culture Committee Chairwoman Kathleen Provost. "Our Tribe needs to be more aware of the ceremonies for the salmon, the deer, the elk, the roots and the berries."

The annual event was put together over months by the Culture Committee, said committee and Tribal member Perri McDaniel.

Tribal member and Culture Committee member Perri McDaniel, left, and her daughter, Tribal member Delia Sanchez, check the food before serving.

Before the crowd arrived, Tribal Council member Chris Mercier took pictures of the First Foods Celebration table. The food was ready when celebrants sat down, as intended by the Culture Committee, which sponsored the event on Saturday, March 19, in the Tribal Community Center.

Photos by Ron Karten

For Tribal Council member Chris Mercier, who made a video with a running commentary of the numerous dishes, the celebration was a good example of the latest movement in food circles — from farm to fork.

"Natives were the original farm-to-fork people," Mercier said. "Our people knew how to thrive, and make do with what was around us."

"Our Tribe needs to understand that these foods were the first foods that we found when we were first introduced to this area," said Provost.

"I'm just so proud of Grand Ronde for keeping tradition alive, and glad that my children can be part of it," said Tribal member Sarah Ross, whose whole family attended.

"We live this. It's part of our daily life."

Tribal Elder Julie Duncan, who came with her husband, Bob, said that this was her second First Foods Celebration. "I come to meet other people and listen to them."

She was a little surprised that the camas reminded her more of potatoes than onions, which is what she thought looking at them before tasting.

Her husband said he enjoyed "the camaraderie with everyone."

Tribal Elder Nora Kimsey, 102, was out for the first time in three months, said her daughter, Tribal Elder Margaret Provost.

"I want to add a huge special thanks to The Wy'East singers for the blessing song honoring the food," said McDaniel.

Wy'East Singers of Portland opened and closed the event. On hand from the group were Teewahnee (Tygh), Norm Michelee (Grand Ronde/Warm Springs/Cowichan/Yurok), James Butler (Siletz), Peter Ponce (Zacatecas), Bryce Grandbois (Sioux/Ojibwe) and Ron Belgard (Siletz, Grand Ronde/Ojibwe/Cree).

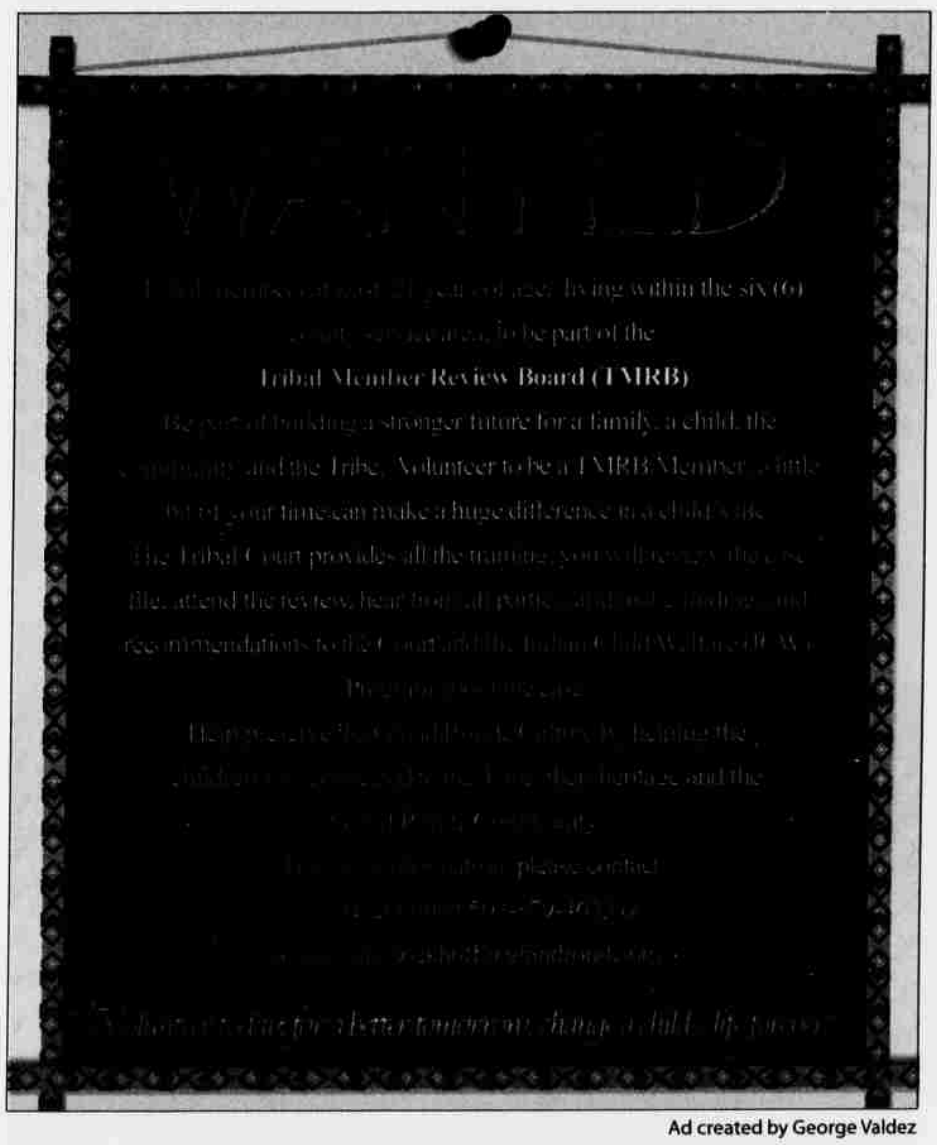
Kathleen Provost, Vice Chair Betty Bly and committee members Logan and McDaniel attended. Other committee members are CeCe Kneeland and Linda Brandon, all members of the Tribe.

Special thanks went to Tribal member Delia Sanchez and Shayleen Macy, who helped with the cooking and cleanup; to Glenn Lamotte, for his "muscle" and Tamarro Gabbert for her cooking expertise; and to Tribal member Joe Hostler, his wife and daughter who come up from California each year to be a part of this special ceremony.

Special thanks from Kathleen Provost also go to Monica Garcia and Don Hendricks.

Tribal Elder and former Tribal Chair Kathryn Harrison attended as did Betty Bly's granddaughter, Tribal member Goldie Bly.

"The people that didn't come missed a lot," said Bob Duncan. ■



Ad created by George Valdez

Ad created by George Valdez