

# Tribal Government Day honors Native First Foods

Annual event celebrates State-Tribal Government-to-Government relationship

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

SALEM — Tribal First Foods became an important metaphor for the current state of Oregon's environment during Tribal Government Day held Friday, May 13, at the State Capitol.

While representatives from Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes discussed traditional Native foods — salmon, camas bulbs and edible wild fruits, such as huckleberry — Tribal government officials reminded state employees and Oregonians in general that Tribal land management techniques preserved a pristine and bountiful land that conquering Europeans reaped the benefits of when they started arriving in droves in the 19th century.

And Tribal representatives did not hesitate to point out the state of the current environment with its polluted waterways and threatened runs of traditional first foods, such as salmon and Pacific lamprey, all of which occurred under European "management."

Bob Garcia, Tribal chairman of the Coos, Lower Umpqua & Siuslaw, brought the point home while participating in a panel discussion on "Sovereignty & Resources" that included Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl A. Kennedy.

Garcia said that his Tribal ancestors always held a salmon ceremony upon the return of the Salmon People from the Pacific Ocean. His people would collect the bones of the salmon caught and consumed and return them to the ocean, thereby honoring the Salmon People and inviting them to return the next year.

"It's a thought process of working with Mother Earth," Garcia said about ancestral values. "Mother Earth is not something you manage. Without salmon, we don't exist. The more the state of Oregon listens to the Tribal point of view, the better the environment will be."

LeAnne Teeman, a Tribal Council member for the Burns Paiute Tribe in eastern Oregon, said that Tribal members who eat traditional foods live longer lives. "We age graciously," she said, adding that her Tribe is working diligently to ensure first foods survive in the high desert environment of Burns.

Kennedy said that Tribal sovereignty and natural resources "go hand-in-hand," adding that she thinks modern society is in a battle for people's hearts.

"If making money is the only reason for living," Kennedy said, "we are in a sorry state. We need to train our children to look after what is here."

Kennedy passionately encouraged audience members in a packed Hearing Room C to effect change by supporting passage of laws that ban pollution of the rivers.

"The dream is to one day drink out of the Willamette River," Ken-



Junior Miss Grand Ronde Makenzie Aaron shakes Gov. John Kitzhaber's hand as she introduces herself after the American Indian Week proclamation signing ceremony during Tribal Government Day at the State Capitol in Salem on Friday, May 13. Looking on at left is Little Miss Grand Ronde Iyana Holmes and on the right is Senior Miss Grand Ronde Nakoosa Moreland.

Photos by Michelle Alaimo

nedy said. "There is a great value in the tried-and-true ways of managing the land. Our people lived here 10,000 years and it was a pretty nice place when you got here."

During an earlier presentation entitled "First Foods," Eric Quaempts, Tribal member and Natural Resources director for the Umatilla Tribe in Pendleton, discussed how Native diets were healthy.

Natives drank clean water from streams for digestion and hydration, harvested roots for carbohydrates, ate fish and deer for protein and gathered huckleberries for sugars.

"It was a high-protein, low-fat diet," Quaempts said. "It was the Atkins diet before there was an Atkins diet. ... Treaty rights are about these foods, but also about access to these foods."

He lamented the current scourge of diabetes in Native communities and how it is tied to Natives abandoning traditional foods in favor of western fast foods.

Besides Native First Foods, this year's Tribal Government Day marked several important anniversaries.

In 1996, then-Gov. John Kitzhaber signed an executive order establishing government-to-government relations between the state and the nine Tribes of Oregon.

In 2001, the Legislature made it official by passing Oregon's State-Tribal Government-to-Government Law.

Kitzhaber, who also happens to

be the current governor in his third non-consecutive term, also signed a proclamation naming May 9-15, 2011, as American Indian Week in Oregon.

Starting at 9 a.m., the State Capitol Galleria was full of nine information tables with Tribal representatives distributing information about their respective Tribes and their traditional foods. Grand Ronde Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, Tribal member Kristen Ravia, Public Affairs Department secretary, and Louis King, program manager with Spirit Mountain Community Fund, staffed the Grand Ronde table.

Tribal Council Vice Chair Reyn Leno, Tribal Council Secretary Kathleen Tom and Tribal Council members Valorie Sheker, Toby McClary, Wink Soderberg, Steve Bobb Sr. and Chris Mercier mingled with state employees and other Tribal representatives in the Galleria.

"I think this is a wonderful opportunity for all the Tribes to get together because we are so diverse in regards to food and we all have rich resources where our reservations are," Tom said. "So it's a great opportunity to share that with people who are not Tribal and don't really know anything about the Tribes."

Soderberg said he likes Tribal Government Day because it is an opportunity to get together with other Oregon Tribes without letting differences get in the way.

"It's good to be able to see them on a friendly basis instead of talking about Tribal stuff," Soderberg said. "I look forward to this event every year."

"I think it's a good opportunity for all the Tribes to get together and it's not political," Leno said. "It's more about people coming together and sharing information about the Tribes. As far as first foods ... it's interesting to everybody that each part of Oregon had its own foods that they (Tribes) depended on. It's interesting to see what they lived off of."

"I think it's important to let everybody know what first foods are and what is traditional to Native American Tribes, how important they are and how they represent our culture," McClary said. "I think it is very important to have the relationship between Native American governments and non-Native American governments and continue that relationship and make it as strong as we can."

It was a very busy day for Kennedy. In addition to sitting on the panel discussion, she appeared on Oregon Public Broadcasting's "Think Out Loud" show with host Emily Harris to explain the importance of Tribal Government Day and the government-to-government relationship between the state and Tribes.

"Tribal Government Day is the time when the state government and Tribes get together to discuss issues, but also celebrate the re-

lationship between the state and Tribes," Kennedy said. "It's really about sovereignty."

Kennedy said that the government-to-government relationship is about partnering and working together to overcome obstacles, improving both state and Tribal governments and better serving all Oregonians, which includes many Tribal members.

At 11:30, Tribal representatives and members of the public were ushered into the cozy Governor's Ceremonial Office, where Leo Stewart (Umatilla), chair of the Legislative Commission on Indian Services, introduced Tribal dignitaries after an invocation from Warm Springs Tribal Elder Delbert Keith.

Kitzhaber then made brief remarks before reading the American Indian Week proclamation and signing it.

"Tribal Government Day is an opportunity, as you know, for all Oregonians to learn about the rich culture and heritage of all of Oregon's Tribes and celebrate and honor the sovereignty of the Native Americans here in the state of Oregon," Kitzhaber said.

"Your histories and cultures are each unique and are an important part of Oregon's past, present and future. It's very important for all of us to reflect for a moment about the history of struggle and sacrifice that you have endured, but also to celebrate your sovereignty and survival, and your tremendous and rich economic, political and cultural gifts and contributions you have made to our great state."

Kitzhaber then posed for photos



Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl A. Kennedy, left, speaks during the "Sovereignty & Resources" panel discussion during Tribal Government Day at the State Capitol in Salem on Friday, May 13. In the middle is Bob Garcia, Tribal chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua & Siuslaw Indians, and on the right, is LeAnne Teeman, a Tribal Council member for the Burns Paiute Tribe, who also participated in the discussion.

with those in attendance and also talked with Grand Ronde Royalty members Nakoosa Moreland, Madison and Makenzie Aaron, Iyana Holmes, and Amaryssa and Amelia Mooney, all dressed in their finest Tribal regalia.

Asked afterward what they thought of meeting Oregon's governor, Grand Ronde Royalty members chimed in with the adjectives "cool," "amazing" and "awesome."

Other Tribal members and staff who attended Tribal Government

Day included Tribal Elders Betty Bly, Leon "Chip" Tom and Kathy Provost, Tribal Cultural Resource Department Manager and Tribal member David Lewis, Tribal Executive Officer and Tribal member Chris Leno, Tribal Director of Development and Tribal member Peter Wakeland, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, Tribal lobbyist and Tribal member Justin Martin and Tribal employees and members Alton Butler, Trevor Aaron, Khani Schultz, Julie Brown, Janell Haller

and Barbara Mercier.

At noon, Spirit Mountain Casino staff, led by Executive Chef Richard Burr, served a lunch of cedar plank salmon, chicken breast, Yukon gold potatoes, asparagus, salad, tortellini pasta salad, beef jerky and pickled herring and salmon.

The line to eat was long — about 650 people were served — and people looked hungry, and, just perhaps, they were thinking about a diet change to include more Native First Foods. ■



Gov. John Kitzhaber reads the American Indian Week proclamation before signing it as, across the table from him from back to front, Grand Ronde Royalty Princess Madison Aaron, Little Miss Grand Ronde Iyana Holmes and Junior Miss Makenzie Aaron look on during Tribal Government Day at the State Capitol in Salem on Friday, May 13.