

Gathering of Oregon's First Nations Powwow is 'awesome'

By Ron Karten
Smoke Signals staff writer

SALEM — American Indians from Tribes across Oregon and the United States celebrated their shared history during the fourth annual Gathering of Oregon's First Nations Powwow held at the Oregon State Fairgrounds on Saturday, Jan. 28.

With tables in the atrium of the fairgrounds' Salem Pavilion, many of the five sponsoring western Oregon Tribes showed their histories and cultures as hundreds came by for the powwow inside. About 50 vendors — all with Native-made goods — dotted the outside circle with their wares.

Grand Ronde Tribal Elders arrived in a Tribal bus and many participated in the afternoon Grand Entry.

Tribal Elder Patsy Pullin attended the powwow, visiting family and friends from her home in Carson City, Nev., where three of her children and six grandchildren reside. She did not come to sing or dance, she said, because she remains in mourning for a year to honor the recent passing of her husband, Gene, who was "a wonderful, honorable man."

Tribal member and Staff Sgt. Frank Hostler also came back to visit during the powwow. Stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington, he is recovering from a number of medical issues and also working with environmental concerns for the 21 Bravo combat engineers, where he is a squad leader. Hostler expects to be released from the Army within the year, after 19 years of service, and study urban planning.

People from the general public also attended. George and Myrna Marks drove from Vancouver, Wash., for the event.

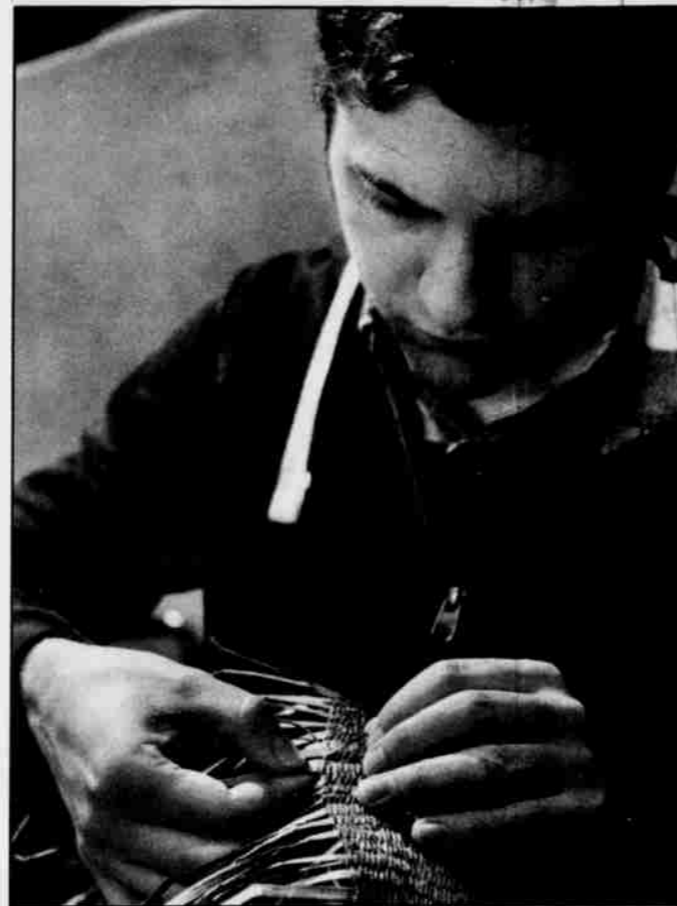
"I have an interest in Indian folklore," said Myrna. "I just like to come and watch the dancing."
"And the music," said her husband, George. "It's pretty amazing to see that the founders of our land are still active."

"It's been an amazing partner-



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Junior Veterans' Queen Isabelle Grout, left, dances with her sister, Tribal member Sophie Grout, during an intertribal dance at the fourth annual Gathering of Oregon's First Nations Powwow at the Oregon State Fair & Expo Center Pavilion in Salem on Saturday, Jan. 28.



Tribal member Jordan Mercier weaves a cedar hat at the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's cultural demonstration table at the fourth annual Gathering of Oregon's First Nations Powwow at the Oregon State Fair & Expo Center Pavilion in Salem on Saturday, Jan. 28.

As at previous powwows, "Standing Strong," a video documenting the histories of the five western Tribes, showed in a side room at the pavilion.

Among six contest specials, Grand Ronde, in the name of Tribal member Leah Brisbois, won the Women's Northern Traditional.

"It was awesome," said Sixkiller. "I know the word is overused, but everything came off so well. There was a good healthy feeling to the powwow.

It was a clean and sober Saturday night. There were a lot of good dancers, songs and prayers."

An incredible 23 drums participated in the event, including host drums The Woodsmen from Grand Ronde, Star Horse from Warm Springs, Little River from Eugene and Thundering Water from Cow Creek.

In addition, the following drums also attended and performed: CSB from Grand Ronde; Autumn Creek and Mee Hock Pride from Warm Springs; Turquoise Tribe, Bulls and Bears, Wy'East and Northern Blackhorse from Portland; Young Society and Top Fox from Chiloquin; Johonaaii, Ahnii Nijii, Wind Dancers and Snake Singers from Salem;

ship with Oregon State Parks," said Grand Ronde Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, who has focused the efforts of the sponsoring Tribes since the event began in 2009.

The Tribes receive free use of the Salem Pavilion each year in late January in return for participating "with songs, dances and traditional technologies" at the opening of the Oregon State Fair each summer.

The event began during Oregon's 150th anniversary. Then-Gov. Ted Kulongoski asked Oregon's Tribes west of the Cascades and east of the Cascades to create separate events. The western Tribes created the First Nations Powwow to demonstrate sovereignty and culture.

Western Oregon's five federally recognized Tribes — the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, Coquille In-

dian Tribe, Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians — annually host this event.

The inaugural First Nations powwow in 2009 coincided with the state's 150th birthday celebration and the Tribes used the moment to remind Oregonians that American Indians have lived on this land for thousands of years before it became a state.

"And that we are still here," noted Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl A. Kennedy at the time.

Former Cow Creek Chairwoman Sue Shaffer, one of the driving forces behind the event, said, "The Tribes have done exceptionally well in sharing the work for this event."

The effort to help the general public better understand the culture and traditions of Oregon Tribes has been helped, she said, by the success of gaming as much as by the ongoing powwows.

"Let's face it: more people have been paying attention since our success with gaming, but I don't think that John Q. Public understands yet how much we've been giving back to our communities," Shaffer said. "This is our homeland. As we do for the citizenry, we're helping ourselves and all around."

"All of us have endured many hardships," said Kennedy. "But we're still here and through our culture, we're helping our people become successful."

"We've become stronger as Tribal peoples," said Klamath Tribes Tribal Council member Frank Summers.

Grand Entry occurred right on time at 1 p.m., with Oregon Tribal representatives and veterans leading the procession. The five Tribes invited the four federally recognized Tribes in eastern Oregon to attend, as well as all American Indians and the general public, and plenty took advantage.

During Grand Entry, veterans received special recognition. American

Indians traditionally serve in the military in far greater numbers proportionately than any other ethnic group. For the first time, the 9/11 Remembrance flag was carried in by Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Tribal member and Tribal Police Officer Colin Roberson.

Vendors sold exclusively Native-made goods at the powwow. Woven hats were available at the Grand Ronde crafts booth, and many examples of fine carving were on display.

Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians and the Confederated Tribes of the Coquille Indian Tribe each displayed canoes that Tribal members built and use in canoe journeys and other cultural events.

Coos artist and teacher Pete Knowlton manned a vendor booth for the atlatl and darts, precursors to the bow and arrow, once used by aboriginals worldwide for hunting. Knowlton teaches the skill to the younger generation and said he can throw the darts 200 yards.

"This is a good place to learn about American Indians in contemporary time," said Nick Sixkiller (Siletz), master of ceremony at the event. Sixkiller has emceed the last three powwows; Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Bob Tom emceed the first one.

State Rep. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, who is co-speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives, attended.

"This is one of the great events to happen in western Oregon," Roblan said. "Most people in Oregon don't understand the long history of Native Americans here, but we need to understand the relationship between the Tribes and Oregon. It's important for us to listen to each other."

Traditional dance specials for men and women were held during the afternoon and on into the evening for both northern- and southern-style dancers. Two more specials, father-son and mother-daughter dances, also were held. Tribal blankets and baskets filled with gifts were prizes.



Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl A. Kennedy greets Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians Chief Warren Brainard before Grand Entry of the fourth annual Gathering of Oregon's First Nations Powwow at the Oregon State Fair & Expo Center Pavilion in Salem on Saturday, Jan. 28.

Malheur from Burns Paiute; Deception Pass from central Oregon; High Rock from Yakima Valley; Signal Butte from Springfield; Splacta Alla from Yoncolla; and Blue Sky Boys from Chemawa Indian School.

Grand Ronde Royalty's Junior Miss Iyana Holmes participated on crutches. She was joined by Grand Ronde Senior Miss Nakooa Moreland, Little Miss Amelia Mooney, Princesses Elizabeth Watson-Croy

Visit the Tribes' facebook page to see more photos

and Amaryssa Mooney, and Junior Veterans' Queen Isabelle Grout, all members of the Tribe.
Jason Stacona (Warm Springs) served as arena director.

Elder and Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. gave the invocation.

Caitlynn Heskett of Salem is part Cherokee. She attended with her friend, Kiowa Natividad of Keizer, and her dog, Miley.

"My grandma is half-Indian and she wanted me to experience a powwow," said Heskett. "I think it's pretty cool. Next time, I'll dress up." ■

'Chris is always available to talk to Tribal members'

MERCIER continued from front page

Mercier, who is serving his third three-year term on the Grand Ronde Tribal Council, was nominated for the award by Tribal Elder Marilyn Portwood and fellow Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene and Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor.

"Besides his full-time job as councilman, Chris is very active in groups that contribute to the county and the Willamette Valley," Portwood wrote on her nomination form, citing Mercier's chairmanship of Spirit Mountain Casino's Board of Directors and being a member, as well as past-president, of the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments.

Portwood also listed Mercier's membership in the Yamhill Community Action Partnership, Yamhill County Transit Authority and Mid-Willamette Valley Area Commission on Transportation.

"Chris is always available to talk to Tribal members," Portwood added.

The Tom-Greene-Taylor nomination said Mercier "is a tireless advocate for his Tribe and the people of the mid-Willamette Valley" and that he has embraced "the responsibilities of being an active partner with our neighboring governments."

The nomination listed the numerous organizations on which Mercier represents the Grand Ronde Tribe. In addition to the ones mentioned by Portwood, Mercier serves or has served on the National Congress of American Indians, the Oregon Tribal Gaming Alliance, National Indian Head Start, Yamhill County Parkway Committee and as the Tribal representative to the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Willamette Partnership.

"Chris is a leader in promoting regional intergovernmental relations," the Tom-Greene-Taylor nomination says, citing his involvement in helping secure \$4 million in Tribal funding for the proposed Newberg-Dundee bypass, concern for transportation safety improvements along the highways 18/22 corridor and his work to bring public transit from Salem to Grand Ronde.

Mercier, 36, is a graduate of the

University of Oregon School of Journalism. Before being elected to Tribal Council for the first time in 2004, he was a contributing writer for the Tribal newspaper and received awards for his work from the Native American Journalists Association. He served as the youngest Tribal chairman ever in the history of the Tribe during the 2006-07 session of Tribal Council.

Mercier has said that this term will be his final one, an indication of his continuing support for term limits on Tribal Council. He is looking forward to pursuing his love of writing and travel.

Attending the awards ceremony were Mercier's brother, Bryan, and mother, Pat, as well as Tribal Executive Officer Chris Leno, Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, Tribal Council Senior Administrative Assistant Lauri Smith and Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom, who all stood and created the University of Oregon "O" sign with their hands as he received the award.

"Honestly, I never thought that I would be doing this," Mercier said

in his acceptance speech. "I never thought that I would get into politics, much less Tribal politics. I did not know that I would serve three terms on the Grand Ronde Tribal Council. It was kind of tough at first ... but I learned a lot from being on COG.

"I think the tendency is for people to assume that Tribal politics and Tribal government are vastly different from mainstream politics and mainstream government. I think there are differences, but I think there are more similarities than differences. So getting to serve with the people on COG and hearing their stories of the challenges they face, it's taught me a lot. ... I'm honored to not only be recognized by you guys, but to work with you."

Mercier thanked Greene, Taylor, Smith, Tom and Leno for their assistance.

"I'm just honored to receive this award," Mercier said.

The Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments includes 32 Oregon cities and towns, three county governments, five special districts and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. ■

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