

Tribes stand strong at Oregon State Fair

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

SALEM — For the fourth straight year, the Oregon State Fair's opening day on Friday, Aug. 24, featured the five federally recognized Tribes in western Oregon standing together and educating fairgoers on Native history and culture.

Members of the five Tribes — the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, Coquille Indian Tribe and the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians — gathered at the Spirit of Oregon stage to educate, share and perform.

The Grand Ronde Tribal contingent included four Tribal Council members — Secretary Jack Giffen Jr. and Chris Mercier, Steve Bobb Sr. and Kathleen Tom — and the Tribal Canoe Family, Tribal Royalty and numerous Tribal members and staff.

Events started at about 11:10 a.m. on a surprisingly sunny, but cool, day as The Woodsmen drum, which included Tribal member Bobby Mercier, performed a grand entry song as the posting of colors occurred.

Tribal Council member Chris Mercier carried in the U.S. flag while Tribal Elder and veteran Gene LaBonte carried in the Grand Ronde Tribal flag.

After The Woodsmen performed "Soldier Boy" in honor of veterans in attendance, Giffen joined Siletz Tribal Chairwoman Dee Pigsley in welcoming fairgoers to the homelands of the Grand Ronde Tribe.

"Welcome to the ceded lands of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde," Giffen said. "We're your neighbors, we're your co-workers, we're your friends, and we are Indian County in Oregon."

Grand Ronde Tribal Royalty then took the stage and introduced themselves. This year's Royalty includes



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

The Grand Ronde Canoe Family and Grand Ronde Royalty perform a dance to "The Blue Heron Song" during the five federally recognized western Oregon Tribes' Standing Strong program on opening day of the Oregon State Fair at the Oregon State Fairgrounds in Salem on Friday, Aug. 24.



Tribal Elder and veteran Gene LaBonte, second from left, carries the Grand Ronde Tribal flag to post during the opening of the Standing Strong program on opening day of the Oregon State Fair at the Oregon State Fairgrounds in Salem on Friday, Aug. 24.

Kiana Leno, Senior Miss Grand Ronde; Kailiyah Krehbiel, Junior Miss Grand Ronde; Iyana Holmes, Junior Veterans Queen; and Junior Miss Princesses Amaryssa and Amelia Mooney, Makenzie Aaron, Madison Ross and Elizabeth Wat-

son-Croy. In addition, Miss Siletz SuSun Fisher introduced herself.

Master of ceremony Nick Sixkiller then invited Bobb to the stage to introduce the Grand Ronde Canoe Family. Some 20-plus strong, the Canoe Family performed eight songs over 45 minutes to the delight of the crowd.

During a performance of "The Blue Heron Song," several audience members jumped up to follow the dancers during the fun song that depicts a blue heron getting stuck in the mud and freeing itself.

After the Grand Ronde Canoe Family, the Siletz Feather Dancers performed and Tribal Royalty quizzed audience members with "Did You Know" facts about Oregon Tribes.

Offstage, each Tribe staffed informational booths. The Grand Ronde booth included Greg Archuleta, Jordan Mercier and Greg Robinson and his son, Justin, both Chinook, and featured carving examples, as well as a children's craft table and informational pamphlets.

"We are here to share our culture and heritage," Sixkiller told audience members. "We tell our children to never forget who you are or where you came from."

The "Standing Strong" event was organized by the Tribe's Public Affairs Department, including Director Siobhan Taylor and Chelsea Clark and Lisa Archuleta.

It is held annually by the Tribes in exchange for free rental of the Salem Pavilion in late January for the Oregon First Nations Powwow. ■

Youth Center seeks volunteers

The Tina Miller Community Center Thrift Store, 110 B. St., Willamina, which helps fund the after-school and weekend youth community center located in the old high school gym, is seeking volunteers who can help run the store, in addition to donated items and customers. The store accepts clothes, books, knickknacks, etc., as donations.

It is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and closed on Sunday and Monday. Donations also can be left at the Wildwood Hotel and Restaurant in Willamina. For more information on volunteering, call 503-876-7897. The youth center and thrift store that funds it are nonprofit and 100 percent self-sustaining and volunteer-run. ■





Basket weaving
with Connie Graves

Where: Elders' Activity Center
When: Every Tuesday
Time: 12:30 P.M.

We will be having a basket weaving class every Tuesday that is open to the public. If you have any questions, contact Brian Krehbiel at 503-879-4639

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