

Tribe hosts First Salmon Dinner

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

WEST LINN — Nine days after holding a private Tribal First Salmon Ceremony at the McLean House in West Linn — the first for the Tribe in 130 years — the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde held a public First Salmon Dinner in the same spot to commemorate salmon returning to the Willamette River.

The dinner also complemented the Tribe's relationship with the Willamette Partnership, a coalition of diverse leaders working "to shift the way people value, manage and regulate our environment," according to the partnership's Web site.

Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Chris Mercier sits on the partnership's Board of Directors.

"The celebration reminds us of the role the salmon has historically played in the lives of our people," Mercier said. "Not only that, but it also highlighted that the Willamette River has always been a vital part of life in the valley, of not only our ancestors, but of most Oregonians. The celebration reaffirmed the Tribe's commitment to being a good steward of our ancestral lands and waterways."

The event started at 5 p.m. with hors d'oeuvres prepared by chef Matt Bennett of Sybaris Bistro in Albany. Attendees sampled a "Northwest sushi" of seared venison loin in a hazelnut Oregon roll, lightly pickled mussels, teriyaki eel and foie gras, steelhead rilletes and a "canoe" of crayfish salad.

At 5:45 p.m., Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor led attendees on a walk around the McLean House and briefly told guests about the Tribe's salmon tradition and the Tribal artwork displayed on the path.

As Taylor recited the Tribal story, the Tribe's Portland area drum group, Place of Our Ancestors, which includes Eric and Erin Bernando, Jordan Mercier, Tribal Council members Jon A. George and Chris Mercier, Elders Dolores Parmenter and Debi Anderson, Lisa and Greg Archuleta, Lei-Lani Hernandez and Sam Robinson (Chinook), drummed and sang. Tribal Council members Cheryl A. Kennedy and Kathleen Tom attended as well.

"One hundred and 30 years ago was the last time the people who make up the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde conducted a salmon ceremony here," Taylor said while standing on a log. "Some of the Tribal people here tonight are direct descendants of those people.

Chef Matt Bennett, owner of Sybaris Bistro in Albany, plates the main course of Chinook salmon, roasted spring vegetables and wild ginger royale during the First Salmon Dinner at the McLean House in West Linn on Wednesday, May 15.



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, standing on a log, tells attendees a story of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde from its Trail of Tears to the Reservation to the Termination era to Restoration to today on a walk around the McLean House during the First Salmon Dinner held in West Linn on Wednesday, May 15.

From left, Eric Bernando, Lisa Archuleta, Tribal Elder Dolores Parmenter, Erin Bernando, Tribal Elder Debi Anderson, Sam Robinson (Chinook), Jordan Mercier, Tribal Council member Jon A. George, Greg Archuleta and Tribal Council member Chris Mercier drum and sing during the First Salmon Dinner at the McLean House in West Linn on Wednesday, May 15.



Chief Oregon John was a member of the Willamette Tumwater Chinook, which controlled Willamette Falls.

"In this spot a week ago, the first Salmon Ceremony in 130 years was held. Today will be the first time in 130 years that we can celebrate the return of salmon publicly with our friends."

Taylor walked guests past carved and painted cedar planks that told the story of the salmon, the falls and the Grand Ronde people.

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"We have been here tens of thousands of years and we will be here tens of thousands of years more," Taylor said. "And we hope to have healthy fish in our rivers."

She also told the story of how Crow saved the last salmon egg from destruction so that Tribal

peoples would always have salmon to eat.

"This ceremony gives thanks for the fish," Taylor said. "We eat everything and the remains go back to the river to ensure the continued return of salmon for the generations to come."

Upon arriving at the Tribal drum group, attendees listened to Kennedy give an invocation and were introduced to Tom, Mercier and George.

"We are the people of the salmon," Kennedy said after giving the invocation, "and as long as the salmon continue to flourish, the people of the salmon will flourish as well."

Kennedy said her grandfather's village was located at the current site of the McLean House. She said the five wooden herons surrounding the house's lawn derived from his telling of the story of the five herons who watched for the salmon return every year.

"I think the people who are here share the same vision as the Tribe," Tom said. "I think you are here for a purpose. You're here to meet the Tribes that were here. We welcome you to our ceded lands ... we appre-



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