

Harvest begins each year in mid-March

PEELING continued from front page

Recently, Mercier was joined by Cultural Education specialists Brian Krehbiel and Flicka Lucero, Cultural Collections Coordinator Veronica Montano, Interpretive Coordinator Travis Stewart and Senior Office Assistant Nicholas Atanacio at Chachalu Museum & Cultural Center to strip eenastick or European willow (also known as white willow) branches for a hamper-making class that is planned for Tribal members.

Mercier said the European willow is not native to the area, but that it grows in abundance and is useful in that it is more “forgiving” than the traditional hazel used for baskets by Tribal ancestors. He said it is perfect for teaching traditional basket-making techniques because of its flexibility.

Mercier said staff members look for the plant buds to know when it’s the right time to harvest. He said they start checking the plants every year in mid-March.

“It fluctuates due to the weather,” Mercier said. “The hazel starts budding. When you see the little buds start coming out you wait until they look like mouse ears and they are about to open up, then that’s the time that they are ready.”

Krehbiel said they harvest the lower levels first and then they move to the upper levels on and near the Reservation.

“You got a window here and you got a window on the upper end of the Rez where we have spots,” Krehbiel said. “You get a week or two down here to gather and then you got a week or two up there. You kind of chase it up the hill.”

Each person on the crew took a willow branch and dragged it



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Cultural Education Coordinator Jordan Mercier peels willow at the Cultural Resources Department on Wednesday, April 5.

through a piece of V-cut wood used to strip off the outer layers. Those layers are peeled off and removed, and a thin, flexible but strong stick emerges ready to be used in hampers or baskets during a culture class later in the year.

Mercier said it’s the same thing with the berries they gather, too.

“The huckleberries have a two-to three-month window,” Mercier said. “They will be ready down here and then continue to be ready for the next few months all the way up to Mt. Hood and really high elevations.”

Mercier said that currently there are shoots popping up from a variety of traditional plants like samen-ulali or salmon berries, cow parsnip (which is also known as Indian celery) and stinging nettles that can be eaten and used in teas.

T’upa or cow parsnip is a type of parsley and tipayt-tipsu or stinging nettles leaves can be boiled or steamed and can be made into a medicinal tea.

“We just got done with (harvesting) plum-tatis-stik or Ocean Spray and hazel for bows and coming up will be the camas and prairie flowers,” Mercier said.

Cultural Resources staff will

be harvesting huckleberries, wild blackberries, Serviceberries, salal and camas for food supplies and cedar, t’aqwela-stik or hazel, juncus, tule, bear grass and cattail for basketry, clothing and regalia materials.

Salal leaves and berries can be eaten and camas is a type of asparagus that grows in the wild in moist meadows. Witch hazel sticks come from deciduous shrubs.

Mercier said the harvesting of traditional plants and materials is one of the most important aspects of what staff members do in Cultural Resources. He said staff members see themselves as the keepers of these traditional activities.

“I think the land, the plants, our places that we have that are known to be places where our people used to be are all vital to a sense of culture and a sense of history and identity,” Mercier said. “For our program it’s all about getting people to know those things as much as possible. There is an infinite amount of knowledge to be learned. Some of it can be taught from a classroom setting or from books, but I think the majority of this kind of knowledge has to be learned by going out and being on the land.”

Mercier said staff members want to get as many people involved in the effort as possible.

“That’s what we are going to try

to do,” Mercier said. “We’re going to try get people out as much as we can and make it as accessible as we can to people and organize as many trips as we can.”

Mercier and Krehbiel said they want to get people doing these activities in a hands-on kind of way so they can really experience what ancestors did.

“When anybody starts doing something their ancestors did – it brings it alive again,” Krehbiel said. “It brings it back alive again in a way that is healthy. No matter how much you read in a book about something like this you won’t get it until you actually put your hands on it and start doing it.”

Mercier nodded in agreement with Krehbiel and said there was a connection being made between the present and past with these types of gathering activities and the passing of knowledge that happens with them.

“It improves that relationship to our culture and for our people now to our ancestors who did this before,” Mercier said.

Some members of the staff found the activity not only a connection to their past, but it was also an enjoyable social activity.

“It’s like therapy for yourself,” Stewart said.

“Yes,” Montano said. “I find it calming.”

“Who knows what this will bring to someone in the next generation,” Krehbiel said.

For more information about signing up for classes through the Cultural Resources Department or participating in traditional gathering activities this year, Tribal members should contact the Cultural Resources Department to RSVP for upcoming field trips. Mercier also encouraged Tribal members to follow announcements on activities through *Smoke Signals* and through the department’s Facebook page. ■

Canoe Family Meetings

Saturdays
April 15th
May 13th
June 10th
July 8th

Meetings will be at
achafhammi, the
Plankhouse from 12 to 2
p.m., lunch provided

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, YOU CAN
CONTACT:
LISA LENO AT 503-879-1489
CRISTINA LARA 503-879-2040
SHANNON STANTON 503-879-1489

Canoe Journey

SAVE THE DATE

12th Annual Native Caring... A Conference to Learn, Connect & Share

Hosted by the Oregon Indian Tribe of ...
The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

Other Oregon partnering Tribes include:

Coquille Indian Tribe ~ Confederated Tribe of Siletz Indians ~ The Klamath Tribes ~
Burns Paiute ~ Tribe Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs ~
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians ~ Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians



April 19-20, 2017
Grand Ronde, Oregon at
Spirit Mountain Casino

Come and join other caregivers of native elders and relative caregivers of children from Northwest Indian communities in this two-day event. You will have the opportunity to attend valuable workshops that will enhance your caregiving skills and provide you with a break from your daily responsibilities.

For more information, contact Darlene Aaron darlene.aaron@grandronde.org 503-879-2078

VENDORS- To register, please contact Suzy Deeds at 503-304-3429