

A time to learn, experience and share

16th annual Native Youth Wellness Day draws approximately 120 attendees

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

"The greatest gift we have received is that of life, but not all of what life gives to us we will see as great. However, anytime you have an opportunity to learn or create something new, it is a gift regardless."

That was the message that marked the 16th annual Native Youth Wellness Day held Friday, March 9, in the Tribal gym.

Approximately 120 youth from Seattle to Burns attended the event, which concluded with an evening Round Dance and meal.

Other highlights included team building, a hypnosis show and various motivational speakers from the Gresham-based Native Wellness Institute.

Tribal Council member Kathleen George welcomed participants to Grand Ronde.

"We are so pleased to have you here," she said. "You honor us with your presence."

Other Tribal Council members in attendance included Brenda Tuomi and Secretary Jon A. George.

Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark, Youth Council Coordinator Shannon Simi and Youth Prevention Activities Assistant Cristina Lara helped organize and attended the event.



Jackie Blackbird, a Native Wellness Institute board member, sits on Sedona Williams' lap as she thinks Williams is Santa Claus while under hypnosis during the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Native Youth Wellness Day held in the Tribal gym on Friday, March 9. A hypnosis show was part of the day and Blackbird volunteered to be hypnotized.



Caleb Gonzales (Cherokee), left, gets his hand autographed by Isaiah Holmes during the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Native Youth Wellness Day held in the Tribal gym on Friday, March 9. Under hypnosis, Gonzales thought that Holmes was New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady.

Robert Johnston, founding member of the Native Wellness Institute and Native American speaker and

from the University of Arizona.

"But on the other side of that was school," she said. "I hated it. I still don't like it to this day. One of the first questions the coach asked me was what my GPA was. I didn't want to answer the question because at the time, it was only 1.8."

After being told getting her grades up was crucial to playing in college, Lopez was offered a scholarship to a private school to play high school softball. She took it, thinking the change would be beneficial.

"I hated it," she said. "I felt like a total outsider."

Lopez continued to excel at softball and received scholarship offers from colleges across the country. In 10th grade, she was called to the dean's office and told she needed a different post-high school plan due to her poor grades.

"I transferred out," Lopez said. "I wasn't going to let anyone tell me what I could and could not do with my future."

By doubling up on classes at night school and attending morning tutoring sessions, Lopez raised her grades and committed to playing for Oregon State University.

"Freshman year was a real eye-opener," she said. "I had a lot to learn and was still making bad decisions. ... What I want to emphasize today is the mental aspect of being a student athlete."

After two successful seasons with the Beavers, Lopez tore her shoulder. A week after the season, she had surgery, followed by eight months of rehab. During the middle of her junior year season, she tore her shoulder again. That meant a second surgery and several more months of rehab. However, her recovery was not progressing and she was told by a doctor a third surgery meant being medically retired.

"I was crushed, crying and in a dark place," Lopez said. "I had to deal with a lot growing up, but the thing I loved the most, that I was the most passionate about, was about to be taken from me and I thought there was nothing I could do about it."

Then Lopez had a realization. She asked for a chance to play left-handed.

"I want to be the best at everything I can do, so I accepted this challenge," she said. "It has been a real struggle."

Just a few days ago, she said she had a training breakthrough, which has motivated her to keep moving forward.

"What happened in the past is gone," Lopez said. "What is in the future doesn't exist yet. The only thing I can control is right now, and my attitude and efforts."

The Native Youth Wellness Day was sponsored by the Tribe's Youth Prevention Program. ■

Visit the Tribe's
facebook
page to see more photos

coach, served as event master of ceremonies. He invited youth to come to the stage and lead the invocation, explaining that it could be anything from a prayer to a song.

Gabriel Redtorishsuk of the Standing Rock Sioux sang "Greeting Our Grandfather" and Hoitema Talayumptewa of the Hopi Tribe said a prayer.

"The reason why I am here today is to bring this idea of wellness and share it with you," Johnston said. "Everything that was given to me was meant to go through me. I use it in my actions, my words and my teachings. That is what wellness is all about."

Oregon State University softball player Lovie Lopez (Wintu) talked to attendees about athletics and leadership.

Despite being a Division One athlete and a successful student, Lopez said she didn't always make the best choices.

"I was a bad kid and making a lot of really bad decisions at a young age," she said. "Softball was an escape for me, a gateway that kept me out of real trouble."

When she was 13, Lopez was told by a coach that she was a good player, but "a little small," and would have to work harder and be better than all of her teammates if she was serious about competing at the Division One collegiate level.

"So I took it as a challenge and started training more and more," she said.

Less than a year later, Lopez received her first scholarship offer

JOIN US!
3.23.2018

College Campus Visit
Explore campus. Get an idea what it would be like to be a student there. Consider different career paths.

2018
LINFIELD
CAMPUS TOUR

◆ **9AM- 4PM**

WHO: All 6-12 grade Native youth.

WHAT: Campus tour, then pizza & a movie

WHEN: March 23, 2018

WHERE: Linfield College

Permission slips can be found at Youth Ed.

Contact Mercedes Jones for more information 503-879-2282