

# Gathering, preparing food took months

**FIRST FOODS continued  
from front page**

ing conducted at Willamette Falls in May.

Those who were apprehensive about eating cuisine they had never tried before need not have been worried. Culture Committee members presented the foods in a familiar way, such as bear chili, wild rice, camas root cakes and elk jerky. Attendees were encouraged to have seconds and thirds from the tables laden with food.

Culture Committee Chair Francene Ambrose smiled as the celebration continued throughout the afternoon. Seeing people coming together as a community made the months of planning worth it.

“The sense of community here is the best part,” Ambrose said. “Everyone is connecting and enjoying the day. As long as everyone is feeling good ... that is the best medicine.”

Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George prepared a blackberry-and-hazelnut cobbler, helped cook and serve the food and led the invocation, where he gave thanks for foods that have nourished the Grand Ronde people since time immemorial.

Tribal Council members Brenda Tuomi, Kathleen George and Michael Langley and Vice Chair Chris Mercier also attended.

Cultural Education Specialist Brian Krehbiel and Cultural Education Coordinator Jordan Mercier prepared camas they had gathered earlier, and Krehbiel also helped make frybread with Elder Faye Smith, who is known for her expertise in creating the dish.

Tribal Elder and former Tribal Council Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison also attended.

Cultural Resources Department Manager David Harrelson said the event promotes community.

“It’s a very warm feeling and the people who are here have come from far and wide,” he said. “It makes me happy to see people coming together over food. We can learn from each other and make our community stronger.”

It was Tuomi’s second year at the event.

“I really enjoy how everyone is coming and working together,” she said. “My favorite part is seeing the salmon cooked traditionally.”

Mercier, also known as the “food dude,” recalls attending the inaugural First Foods event held in 2009 and trying sea anemone.

“I like this because we have lost track of what people have historically eaten,” he said. “I love this event because when you think of a culture, you think of music and food. Food says a lot about a people



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

**Youth Council Chair Payton Smith cuts elk meatloaf to serve at the First Foods Celebration held at achaf-hammi, the Tribal plankhouse, on Saturday, June 2.**



**Jade Unger takes salmon off the fire to be served at the First Foods Celebration held at achaf-hammi, the Tribal plankhouse, on Saturday, June 2. Helping him is April Makinson.**

foods are still a part of us. You can taste the love that the cooks put into this food. I am thankful for our young ones here today. They will not know that we didn’t do this in our generation or our parents’ generation.”

Former Culture Committee member Sarah Ross said that the event has grown and that the teas served could be both medicinal and everyday drinks.

“I am so proud to see this and all of you join in it,” Ross

said. “The history of our people is that we use everything around us. ... Our ancestors knew how to use those things. One of the mindsets I worked to bring into the community is that foods are medicine. They are affecting your spirit. That is the most important takeaway from today. Sometimes these foods taste a little different than what we are used to, but they are very important and make us strong.”

Jordan Mercier said he was grateful to be at the First Foods event and told attendees that the Cultural Resources Department was partnering with Natural Resources is to make food more accessible by creating a space at tayi prairie on Grand Ronde Road, which is near the Housing Department and across the street from the governance campus.

“That work is starting to happen,” he said. “We need the landscape to promote our first foods to be healthy and abundant. This will be a place for the community to connect with plants.” ■

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and their culture.”

Kathleen George said her favorite part is Tribal members coming together in the spring, but doing it around a time of thanksgiving.

“This is our opportunity to all come together, honor our traditional foods and give thanks to those for feeding us for another year,” she said. “Deer is one of my favorites. It always has been. I have been a deer eater since I was a baby.”

Several drummers and singers, led by Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier, Jordan Mercier, Krehbiel, Harrelson and Jon A. George, led the opening song.

Ambrose encouraged attendees to take a deep breath and exhale their worries and stress.

“We are going to nourish our spirits, bodies, hearts and minds

with this food,” she said. “Remember that our ancestors used these foods to nourish themselves and take the opportunity to gather and enjoy the day.”

Ambrose also thanked Culture Committee members for the months they invested in gathering and preparing the foods.

After everyone had eaten, the celebration continued in the plankhouse with more singing and drumming.

Culture Committee Elders Margaret Provost and Smith, and members Ambrose, Joanna Brisbois, Shayla Murphy, Eric Bernando and Logan Kneeland worked on the First Foods event, with the assistance of Tribal Council liaison Jon A. George, and advisers Tracie Meyer and Debi Anderson.

Bobby Mercier said he was thankful for everyone who attended.

“We are also here to feed the spirit today,” he said. “The food nourishes our body and we are fortunate to be in a place like this where these things can happen. ... All of these