

# Opportunities to reflect

## Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam follows up successful 2018 event

By Danielle Frost  
Smoke Signals staff writer

When the Tribe hosted its first “Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam” in April 2018, it sought to give Tribal members an opportunity to connect, remember the past and learn how to best care of their community in the future.

A smaller, follow-up gathering was held Wednesday, Jan. 23, in the Tribal Community Center so that past attendees could reconnect, and to provide an opportunity for new people to attend.

“Tilixam” means “People, family or gathering” in Chinuk Wawa, and the event was organized by Tribal Social Services Manager Dana Ainam along with the Native Wellness Institute of Gresham.

“When we learn about healing and compassion, we are responsible for the energy we bring into a room,” Native Wellness Institute Executive Director Jillene Joseph said. “We can start healing with something simple, emitting positive energy.”

Native Wellness Institute’s mission is to promote the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of North America’s indigenous peoples, and to bring about positive changes. It has existed for 18 years and organizers have facilitated hundreds of community healing gatherings throughout North America using the Gathering of Native Americans curriculum.

The Gathering of Native Americans curriculum model was developed between 1990 and 1994 by several founding Wellness Institute members. Organizers say it has stood the test of time as an effective healing and planning model for Tribal communities addressing effects of historical and inter-generational trauma.

“GONA opened up the gate to sit in a circle, share and bring our traditional medicines,” Joseph said. “It made it OK to bring our cultural values to a community gathering.”

“When we hear the word ‘GONA,’ even in that name is healing,” said Robert Johnston, founding member and event co-facilitator. “It’s about re-connection. When we’re together it gives us opportunities to take care of each other. That’s a good way of opening up.”

The event attracted 25 participants, including Tribal Council members Michael Langley, Denise Harvey and Kathleen George, who attended during various portions of the day.

“There is only so much Tribal Council can do,” Harvey said. “It takes our community to bring us together. You all participating here today means so much. I’m really happy you are here.”

Tribal Elder and past Tribal Council Chair Kathryn Harrison gave the opening blessing. After-



The Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam was held in the Tribal Community Center on Wednesday, Jan. 23. It was a follow-up to the April 2018 Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam.



Former Tribal Council Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison is joined by Nancy Renfrow, left, Health Committee Chairwoman Bernadine Shriver and Jordan Cocker (Kiowa Tungan) of the Native Wellness Institute during the Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam that was held in the Tribal Community Center on Wednesday, Jan. 23.

canoe journeys I can while I still can.”

The next exercise involved Joseph asking participants to partner up and then giving them a statement to

ward, with everyone gathered in a circle, they shared what they were looking forward to that day as well as in 2019.

“I thank God in the morning because I wake up and I’m still here,” Harrison said with a smile. “But at 94, almost 95, I’m still trying to figure out why I’m here. So, I’m going to go to all of the meetings and

answer in 30 seconds, such as “These are my thoughts about Grand Ronde culture.” The room buzzed with activity and, at times, laughter.

“One of the things we talked about last time were the lasting impacts of trauma,” Joseph said. “One of these is chronic negativity. Our brains and the way they oper-



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Shaiyla Krebs, 11, and Social Services Manager Dana Ainam participate in one the exercises during the Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam held in the Tribal Community Center on Wednesday, Jan. 23. It was a follow-up to the April 2018 Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilixam.

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ate come from a place of keeping us safe. ... It contributes to the chronic negativity. The response to that is to practice being positive. When we’re positive, that is the energy that will be around us.”

Then, attendees were asked to share some of their favorite memories from the April event.

Responses ranged from weaving, going to Chachalu, making a “River of Life,” seeing old photos of Elders and making necklaces.

“I was 4 or 5 years old during the time we were terminated,” said Elder Carmen Mercier. “I remember feeling really sad that our friends and family were moving. I remember my grandma saying there will always be a connection we never lose. Now, the grandchildren of those families are coming back home.”

Joseph referred to the event’s activities as an opportunity to have collective healing.

“We are realizing that we are not alone in our experiences and there is healing,” she said.

Other activities included a culture walk, healing groups and an affirmation circle.

“I really appreciate everyone being here,” Ainam said. “It speaks to the need to connect. ... We’re looking to have another full GONA event in April or May, and are hoping we can have a youth one as well.” ■