

‘This is the restoration of a relationship’

**FISH continued
from front page**

in a long time. There are lots of people here I don’t normally see, and it’s great they want to know more about how the fish was a staple of our ancestors. ... Salmon is integral to all aspects of Tribal life.”

Tribal Elder Debi Anderson, who was beading necklaces at the event, agreed.

“The turnout is really nice,” she said. “It is one of the largest I’ve seen and it’s good to talk with people who don’t know about our Tribe. I also love that the Elders were brought here from Grand Ronde.”

The ceremony opened with Grand Ronde Tribal drummers Ty George, Jade Unger, Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George, Cultural Protection Specialist Chris Bailey, Interpretive Coordinator Travis Stewart, Historic Preservation Technician Nicolas Atanacio, Cultural Resources Department Manager David Harrelson, Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier, Cultural Education Coordinator Jordan Mercier and Tribal Elder Greg Archuleta.

The fish ceremony was organized by the Tribe’s Cultural Resources Department, with support from Tribal Council staff and Public Affairs.

“This event provides a shared experience with the Tribe’s partners,” Historic Preservation Manager Briece Edwards said. “It’s a chance for people to learn that they are living on the Tribe’s ceded lands. The Tribe is a good host, and part of that is to provide education and a comfortable place to ask questions.”

After attendees ate a buffet lunch of salmon, fruit, cookies, salads and crackers, Jon A. George gave an invocation. Other Tribal Council members in attendance were Vice Chair Chris Mercier, Denise Harvey, Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, Kathleen George and Lisa Leno.

Other staff attending included General Manager David Fullerton, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, Chachalu Manager Julie Brown, Portland Area Office Tribal Services Representative Lisa Archuleta and Cultural Collections Specialist Nick LaBonte.

Lunch was served by Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez, Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Baranski and Deputy Press Secretary Sara Thompson. The salmon was prepared over an open fire by Jordan Mercier, Unger and Tribal Elder Greg Archuleta.

Fullerton said he was happy to have worked with several of the partners in attendance, which included city, county and state government officials, and various nonprofit groups.

“Catching the fish in the nets at the falls, it has been an honor to be part of this,” he said. “It’s always exciting.”

Kathleen George said she enjoyed seeing so many Tribal members, friends and partners.

“We are coming together as a community and doing it in the



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Enrollment Committee Chairwoman Debi Anderson talks with Isaac Brown, 8, and Madeline Brown, 13, at one of the information tables during the Fish Ceremony held at Willamette Park in West Linn on Saturday, May 18. The Tribe celebrated fishing off the platform at Willamette Falls and those who made it possible.



right place, next to the river,” she said. “This is the restoration of a relationship. I see it as coming full circle with the falls.”

Jon A. George echoed those sentiments.

“Willamette Falls is so important to us,” he said. “I have had the opportunity to gather eels, to be able to stand in the river, at the falls and the feeling is so emotional. It’s like our ancestors are there with us. It’s an emotional tie to what our ancestors have done for years.”

Kennedy said she was glad to share Tribal traditions with the community.

“As a Tribe, Termination had a devastating effect on us,” she said. “Whether it is Oregon or federal legislation, I am struck by how much power is held by a few people. I don’t think that we the people really agreed with that. I think today everyone realized the treaties made with us were a huge real estate deal (for the government).”

Kennedy added that although the government had tried to assimilate Tribal people through policies and confiscating land, the Grand Ronde Tribe’s resilience kept them alive.

“The fish is what fed us,” she said. “We are here today because of what was done then. ... I want to thank our Tribal fishermen. Fishing at Willamette Falls is a tremendous undertaking, and all of you who fished are carrying on traditions that are thousands of years old.”

Tribal fishers in attendance were recognized. They included Jordan Mercier, Bobby Mercier, Unger, Maintenance Technician Nick Kimsey and Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson.

Jordan Mercier said fishing as

his ancestors had was a privilege.

“I was honored to be one of the first people five years ago to help conduct the Fish Ceremony,” he said. “We were still going to the ladder back then. It’s an honor to be able to do this the way our ancestors in Oregon City did. It’s nice to be able to gain our rights back.”

Unger said fishing at the falls from the Tribe’s new platform was a “deep honor” in his life.

“It is dangerous and tiring, but always a good feeling afterward,” he said. “It’s a life-changing experience.”

Wilson added that when Grand Ronde went back to the falls to fish, it benefitted everyone.

“It helps with clean water and healthy streams, and fish runs,” he said. “It’s such a great experience.”

Other speakers at the Fish Ceremony included State Sen. Arnie Roblan, who also serves on the Spirit Mountain Community Fund Board of Trustees. Metro Councilor Christine Lewis, Clackamas County Chair Jim Bernard and State

Rep. Rachel Prusak also spoke.

Cultural Resources Department Manager David Harrelson talked about the importance of the Fish Ceremony.

“Generally, the first Fish Ceremony is for members of the Tribal community,” he said, referring to the ceremony held in Grand Ronde on May 2. “But we also wanted to have an event for the larger community, and when we think of fishing, this is the most logical place to have it.”

After the speakers were finished, Bobby Mercier invited everyone to walk down to the river, where the fish bones were returned to the waters.

“We have to remember to say thank you to the salmon, so we are not just taking,” he said.

At the banks of the Willamette River, Mercier said a blessing while Kimsey removed the bones out of a cedar cooking tray and placed them in the water. The melodies of the Salmon Song drifted out as the fish remains descended to the bottom of the river. ■



From left, Ty George, Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier and Cultural Education Coordinator Jordan Mercier drum and sing during the Fish Ceremony held at Willamette Park in West Linn on Saturday, May 18. The Tribe celebrated fishing off the platform at Willamette Falls and those who made it possible.