

Traditional food, contemporary style

First Foods Celebration at achaf-hammi attracts 100

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

A child gazed upon the array of choices at the First Foods Celebration and made a quick decision: The fish heads were an emphatic “no,” but the fresh salmon a definite “yes.”

“I’d like the yummy part, please,” he said.

Being exposed to new foods, even if there was some hesitancy to try all of them, is a big part of Grand Ronde’s annual celebration of Native foods. Held in the cooking area outside Tribal plankhouse achaf-hammi on Saturday, June 29, conversation, cooking and laughter were in abundance.

“I loved it,” Culture Committee Chair Francene Ambrose said. “We had so many new dishes and new attendees.”

Ambrose said that events featuring food and fun are easy ways to connect people in a nonintimidating environment. She cooked venison chili and bear spaghetti, and also brought canned salmon and chokecherries to share. Chokecherries have a bitter aftertaste, but help to cleanse the palate after heavy meals, she said.

Although salmon is always a popular choice, venison stew, venison meatloaf, fry bread sliders, elk chili, walnut flour chocolate chip cookies and spaghetti with bear meatballs were also top choices among attendees.

The celebration of First Foods aims to build a connection between the community and the Tribe’s traditional foods and medicines, as well as bridge the gap between the grocery store and where the food comes from, and tell youth the story behind the food and why it is important to continue traditions.

Approximately 100 Tribal members, friends and community members attended the celebration. Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier, Secretary Jon A. George and Tribal Council members Denise Harvey, Kathleen George and Michael Langley served food to hungry attendees.

“I really love showcasing our Native foods,” Jon A. George, who



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Tribal member Jade Unger prepares salmon, including some that were caught from the fishing platform at Willamette Falls, at the First Foods Celebration held at achaf-hammi on Saturday, June 29. The event honors traditional cooking and contemporary cooking with traditional foods.

At left, Tribal Elder Debi Anderson stirs venison and barley soup during the First Foods Celebration.



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“There are some really good feelings at the plankhouse today,” she said. “It’s a fabulous day of sharing our culture.”

Tribal Cultural Advisor Bobby

See FIRST FOODS continued on page 9

serves as council liaison to the committee, said. “And the celebration of people coming together.”

His contribution to First Foods included elk heart, clam chowder and a blackberry cobbler.

“The clam chowder is definitely my favorite,” he said. “I cooked it all day for this.”

Tribal fisherman Jade Unger prepared wild salmon that he had caught from the fishing platform at Willamette Falls, while Culture Committee members Ambrose, Eric

Bernando, Joanna Brisbois, Logan Kneeland, Shayla Murphy, Sarah Ross and Faye Smith prepared various meat dishes, soups, stews and salads, with the help of Elder advisers Debi Anderson and Tracie Meyer.

Anderson made the venison and barley soup.



Tribal and community members enjoy appetizers during the First Foods Celebration held at achaf-hammi on Saturday, June 29.



Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George transfers bear meatballs to a container for Culture Committee member Shayla Murphy.