

Oregon has history of racism against people of color

**SUPPORT continued
from front page**

come in and take over; we wanted to help. I'm able to show up and be confident I can be a giver and not a taker."

Lilly then got in touch with Native leaders such as Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Denise Harvey, Native Wellness Institute Executive Director Jillene Joseph (Gros Ventre), State Rep. Tawna D. Sanchez (Shoshone-Bannock, Ute and Carrizo) and city of Portland

Tribal Liaison Laura John (Blackfeet/Seneca) to gather their input.

One of the requests made by Umtuch was that leaders represent themselves and not their organization.

"We want them to show up as who they are and take the information back to their organization," Umtuch said. "We don't want the organization leading; it is everyone's vision. We have a lot to offer as a people. It's everyone standing up to walk the talk."

Harvey participated in a Zoom

meeting in mid-June with other Native American leaders and others to provide input.

"They asked for all of us to speak, then everyone else could question and comment," Harvey said. "Most people in the Zoom appreciated our input. We talked to them about prejudices toward Natives. ... We didn't come to any decisions, just talked about things to better understand each other."

Sanchez participated in the Zoom call because she said she feels it is important for Native people to support the African-American community.

"We have to be real about the foundation of this country and the laws that were made which targeted people of color for centuries," she said. "The laws we make now affect everyone, but the view for people of color is often different, and if you don't know us, you can't recognize it."

Sanchez noted that Oregon has its own racist history of laws that discriminated against people of color.

"This is much deeper than we all thought," she said. "The police have killed a lot of people, but killing Black people seems to be an accepted norm. And it's because of how people of color are often perceived. It's important for us as Native people to look at that, and what our ability is to help shift and change that. We have our own embedded history of oppressing each other because of skin color and blood quantum. It's very important we recognize that and ask ourselves why wouldn't we support Black Lives Matter? We are all struggling with these issues. We all live in a system where our lives don't matter as much. We need to work to heal that and make change."

Lilly used his organizational skills and community connections to continue to spread the word to Northwest Native leaders. But before the Zoom meeting came a solidarity rally in downtown Portland.

"I created a little logo and put it on social media, and it just got picked up really fast and spread," Lilly said. "It turned into a pretty big rally. A lot of people were asking for this and wanted to be a part of something. We had a large group of dancers and drummers, and shared



Denise Harvey

the mic."

The group then led protestors as they were crossing the Burnside Bridge in Portland on Friday, June 5, with dancing, singing and drumming.

"A few of us got together afterward and exchanged information, and realized there was a real desire to engage and support the Black Lives Matter movement, but how?" Lilly said. "We were wondering if we should also bring up our issues and experiences?"

The group discussed several options, but still felt flummoxed.

"So, we did what we should do when there is confusion, and we asked our Elders," Lilly said. "We couldn't do so in person due to COVID-19, so we hopped on a Zoom call. There was a lot that was shared."

Lilly and other supporters followed up with an in-person meeting at Peninsula Park in Portland a few days later.

"We found out this movement taps into personal feelings and some shared their own experiences with police brutality and the injustices they have experienced," Lilly said. "Our next step is to reach out to Black Lives Matter leaders and continue this conversation. Right now we're coordinating a group of 10 or so people to reach out in different ways and see how we can best help. We're hoping to continue to have a weekly talking circle and figure out our next steps."

So far, four key ideas include uplifting the voice of Black Lives Matter and Black leaders, continuing to highlight their message, create talking points for discussing this support with others, and checking in frequently with BLM leaders to help ensure they feel supported.

Lilly added that Native support will not be short-lived.

"We want to continue this conversation and message," he said. "We are in this for the long haul."

Native Wellness Institute, based in Gresham, released the following statement.

"BLM is well aware the Native community fully supports their efforts and is determining how the Native community can support them," it said. "Simultaneously, the Native community has had a few collective discussions around how we can support the movement."

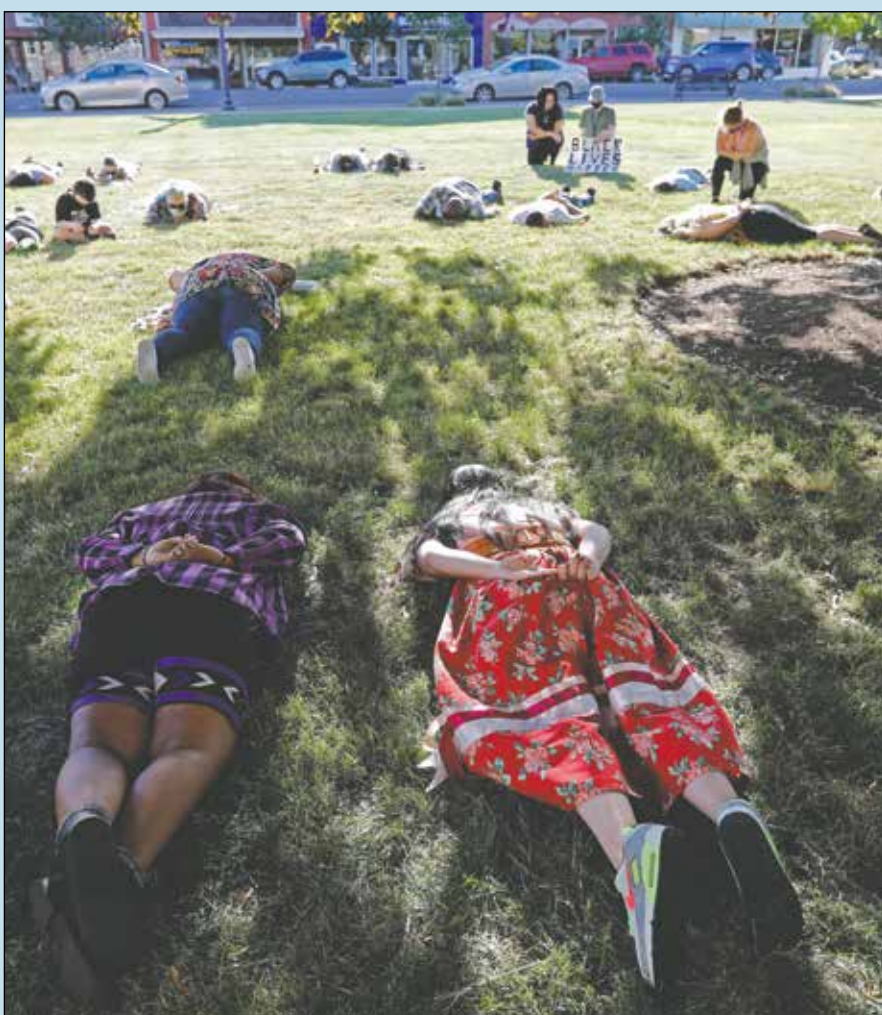
For more information, contact Umtuch at jasonumtuch83@gmail.com or Lilly at jrlilly11@gmail.com. ■

Protest support



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Meth & Opioid Coordinator Elaine LaBonte Robertson, front, along with, rear from left, Early Childhood Education Program Manager Angie Blackwell, Pim Nelson, Auburn Logan, Shawnessy Sohappy, 14, Leneisha Whitefeather, Diana Sohappy and Sonia Lafferty welcomed participants to the "I can't breathe: Sit in for George Floyd" event held at the Polk County Courthouse on Friday, June 26. Forty people gathered to remember Floyd, whose death in Minneapolis, Minn., started a nationwide protest movement in support of Black Lives Matter. The event included an 8-minute-and-46-second period of silence to represent how long a police officer knelt on Floyd's neck before he died.



Tribal members Leneisha Whitefeather, left, and Auburn Logan join others during a period of silence during the "I can't breathe: Sit in for George Floyd" event held at the Polk County Courthouse on Friday, June 26.

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