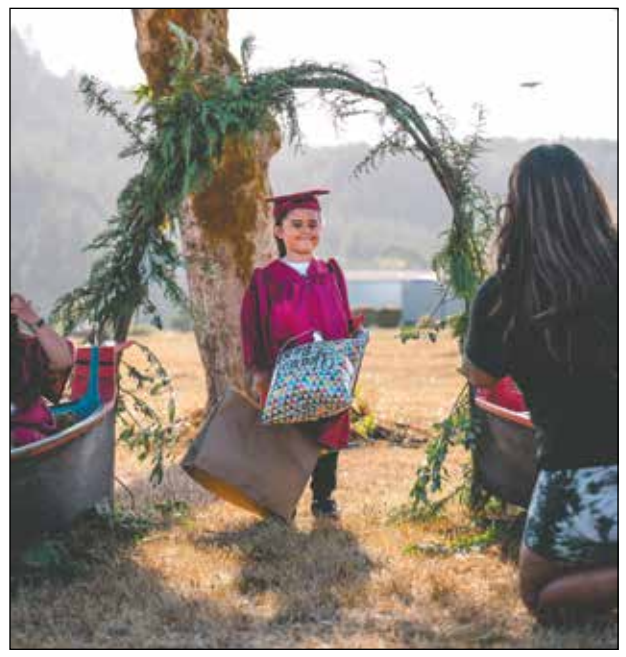
Wawa graduates



The Chinuk Wawa Education Program held its preschool graduation on Wednesday, Aug. 18. Graduates included, from left, Tribal member Ava Lomboy, 5; Tribal descendant Lennon Martinez, 5; descendant Cassius Parkins, 5; and Tribal member Willow Squetimkin, 5.

Contributed photos by Leland Butler

Watchlist: 'Rare audio of Indigenous languages saved by invention 100 years later'

By Kamiah Koch

Social Media/Digital journalist

The National Science Foundation published a video to YouTube to share how the University of California Berkeley was putting technology to work to revitalize Native American voices from the past.

The video, published in August 2017, explained that linguists at Berkeley were digitalizing a collection of 78 different Indigenous California languages from more than 100 hours of audio recordings.

This collection is made up of recordings on brown wax cylinders from more than a 100 years ago. The video explained they were able to extract the audio with technology developed in the early 2000s using laser scanners to pull it out optically, rather than having to touch or damage the wax.

But the researchers working on digitizing the century-old recordings said their process also was challenged by the age of the cylinders. Over the years, mold had found its way into the wax and ate away at segments of the audio.

However, Andrew Garrett, a linguist at Berkeley working on the team to save the recordings, said in the video that they were still able to compile the audio and restore it with computer software.

Garrett said he was working on compiling Yurok stories from the recordings and pairing them with English translations. This way, researchers could understand the language better with sentence patterns, morphology and pronunciation.

These digitized recordings are not only important to researchers, they are important to the communities that once spoke the languages.

The video includes Louis Trevino, from the Rumsen Ohlone community. The video stated there is no one still alive who grew up speaking Rumsen, but the Berkeley collection holds 27 recordings of the language.

"Because we don't have old-timers who can sing these songs, or other songs for us, this is one of our sole resources," Trevino said. "For that reason it is especially precious to us."

The National Science Foundation video played a recording from 1907 of a Yurok Native speaking his language. It's difficult to decipher at first, but it's a valuable remnant of a language almost lost.

To watch the four-minute video on YouTube, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6AqEppqUDA or go to the *Smoke Signals* YouTube channel and find it linked under our "Watchlist" playlist. ■