

Spring Celebration fetes relationship between state and Tribes

By Danielle Harrison

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SALEM – For the first time since 2019, the Legislative Commission on Indian Services' Spring Celebration returned to the Oregon State Capitol in Salem, but with a new twist: It was held outdoors instead of the Capitol Rotunda due to ongoing construction.

"It's good to be here on this land," Legislative Commission on Indian Services Vice Chair and Coquille Tribal Chair Brenda Meade said. "This is blessed land and we are blessed to live here in this place that we call Oregon. We have been working a lot this season. It is spring and a time for our Tribes to go out and prepare for the seasons. But it is also important to be here today."

Almost 49 years ago, the state of Oregon established the Legislative Commission on Indian Services. Next came an executive order creating a government-to-government relationship between the state and its nine federally recognized Tribes. The relationship is celebrated with the Spring Celebration, which is held biennially to coincide with when the Legislature is in session. This year's event was on Thursday, May 18.

Meade said she was pleased to see so many Tribal leaders in attendance.

"Many, many bills are running through that building, right behind me, that are going to impact the Tribes and our communities forever, and we shouldn't take it lightly. I do not believe the Oregon Tribes do. ... The Legislative Commission on Indian Services allows our Tribal leaders to come together to talk with our legislators and to talk about how it impacts our people and to think about how best we should make these decisions together."

Representatives from seven of the nine federally recognized Tribes attended. The Siletz and Klamath Tribes were unable to attend. Tribal information tables were on display as they usually are, only this time it was at Wilson Park, adjacent to the Capitol.

Grand Ronde's table was staffed



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Council member Jon A. George speaks during the Legislative Commission on Indian Services' 2023 Spring Celebration held in Wilson Park on the Oregon State Capitol grounds in Salem on Thursday, May 18. Tribal Council members Brenda Tuomi, left, and Denise Harvey, middle, also spoke briefly.



Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi carries the Grand Ronde flag during the procession to start the Legislative Commission on Indian Services' 2023 Spring Celebration held in Wilson Park on the Oregon State Capitol grounds.

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by Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez. It included chocolates, lapel pins and folders of information on the Tribe.

The celebration began with Tribal government leaders bringing in their respective Tribal flags. Also included were the American flag, Oregon flag and POW/MIA flag.

Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi carried in the Grand Ronde flag. Other Tribal Council members in attendance were Jon A. George and Denise Harvey.

Warm Springs Tribal Council member Carlos Calica gave the invocation and sang a prayer song.

Afterward, Tribal leaders were given the opportunity to speak to attendees. George, Harvey and Tuomi each said a few words and

George drummed and sang.

"It's an honor to stand up here today to address each and every one of you," he said. "We thank you for this. We stand upon the lands of our people, the Santiam Kalapuya."

Added Harvey, "I want to welcome you all here. It's an honor to be here. Enjoy your day, get all the information you can."

Commission Director Patrick Flanagan also welcomed attendees to the Spring Celebration.

"Thank you for being here," he said. "These connections are how relationships are built."

Senate President Rob Wagner said he has an appreciation for LCIS and all the work it does to advocate on behalf of Oregon's nine Tribes.

"I want to give my deep appreciation and thanks to LCIS," he said. "It's a joy to be spending just a few minutes with you this morning. I know this celebration typically happens in the Capitol Rotunda. But spending this early summer morning on our beautiful grounds is a pretty darn good substitute. ...

"One of my biggest responsibilities here is to listen. People come into our offices and the Legislature every day to discuss topics of critical importance to them and their communities. And it is our duty, all of us, to hear them and truly work to understand these diverse perspectives and this is particularly true when I get the opportunity, the blessing of meeting with Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes. Each is unique and special. The Tribes have knowledge and wisdom that we all in the Capitol space must listen to."

After the speakers finished, attendees perused the Tribal information tables, enjoyed fry bread from Portland's Native American Rehabilitation Association, and got an up-close view of a canoe carved from a western red cedar, which was brought by the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw.

Harvey said it felt great to be back at the event, especially with the outdoor component added.

"I've been coming here for more than 20 years and it's the first time we've done it outside," she said. "It's nice to see all of the Tribes and everyone enjoying themselves."

It is the first Spring Celebration for Flanagan, who took over as director in 2021.

"It's great to go to the committee meetings and attend the annual Tribal summit, but this is a nice opportunity for Tribes to get together and chat with the community and legislators as they pass through. There's good attendance and participation, and that's one of the huge benefits to having it outside. Encouraging relationships and understanding is what this is all about."

Acting Secretary of State Cheryl Myers closed the ceremony by reading a proclamation declaring May 18-25 as American Indian Week. ■

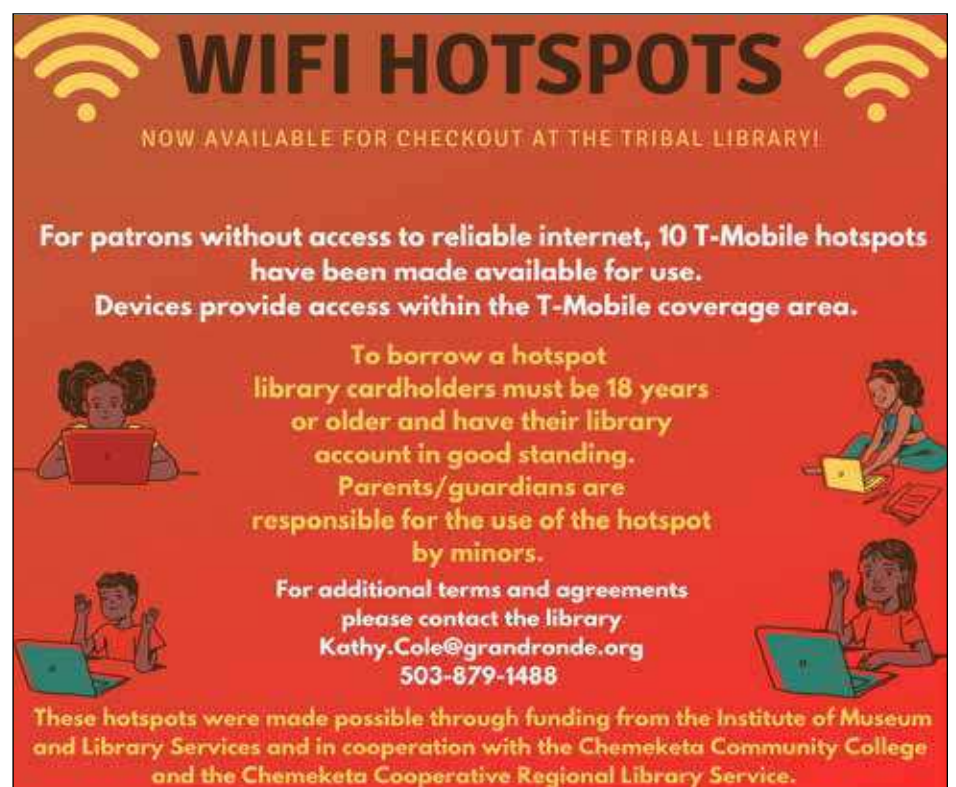


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