

Fashion show highlights Indigenous talent

Nicole Montesano
Smoke Signals staff writer

Traditional coastal designs woven into fashionable modern garb made a statement Thursday, July 25, as models displayed the talents of some 15 Indigenous designers at Spirit Mountain Casino for The Northwest/West Coast Indigenous Fashion Show.

Approximately 350 people attended the event. Clothing displayed in the show ranged from traditional regalia to T-shirts, business clothing and evening wear, and even a bridal gown. Ribbon skirts and a traditional basketry baby carrier were among the items displayed.

The result, participants said, was moving and powerful.

“I loved being a part of it and I think Indian Country needs more of it,” Tribal member Fabian Quenelle, who modeled some of the men’s clothing, said.

His favorite piece was a white jean jacket from Alicia’s Designs, by designer Alicia Marie that sported a black Thunderbird motif.

“It was very, very special,” Tribal member Stacey Runningbird, who also modeled several of the items, said. Runningbird said she especially loved the traditional regalia, and all the coastal designs on the boots designed by Marie.

“They were so beautiful,” Runningbird said. “She had like animals, like raven, the eagle and I think one of them was an orca.”

One of her favorite experiences of the night was seeing another model who was trying modeling for the first time discover a talent for the work.

“You know when you see a natural, their eyes lighting up to see what potential they have,” she said “I think that it was awesome to see what our people are doing, and I think that any way I can support women in general, but it’s even more of a bonus when it’s your people you’re supporting.”

For organizer Keeli Nehani Littleleaf (Warm Springs), that was the whole point.

“The fashion show started as a



Tribal member Auburn Logan models a dress from Wiyeépi'im Collective designed by Lydia Skahan during the Northwest/West Coast Indigenous Fashion Show at Spirit Mountain Casino's Event Center on Thursday, July 25.

Photos by Michelle Alaimo

‘Indigenous people have always been fashionistas. We love to make something big and groundbreaking, that no one’s ever seen before.’
~ Fashion show co-coordinator and Tribal member Auburn Logan

dream to provide opportunities to local indigenous people,” she told Smoke Signals.

Littleleaf began her efforts by simply asking people at powwows if they would be interested.

An artist, dancer, model, educator and former Miss Oregon contestant, as well as first-runner up for Miss Sweetheart America, Littleleaf showcased some of her own designs in the show in collaboration with Ame Manon.

Co-coordinator and Tribal member Auburn Logan said she was thrilled to participate. “There’s a lot of representation in the plains; which we love...we love the representation with our representatives over in the plains and the southwest, however, there was a lack of representation in the northwest,” Logan said. “We were one of the last areas to be affected by colonization and we are still rich in culture.”

The designs showcased that in

ways both bold and subtle, with basket-weave designs and beaded motifs showing thunderbirds, orcas, ravens and eagles.

“Indigenous people have always been fashionistas,” Logan said, noting the flamboyant designs of traditional regalia, and the rich designs found in traditional basketry, beaded bags and other items. “We love to make something big and groundbreaking, that no one’s ever seen before.”

She continued, “Keeli fulfilled and made so many dreams come true. I’m from Grand Ronde and so happy this happened at my Tribe’s casino. This is where I’m familiar with, I feel comfortable here, feel safe here. It’s just so special.”

She said the show also served to debunk stereotypes.

“Not all of us have dark skin, not all of us have long hair, not all of us are tall,” Logan said.

In addition to showcasing the designers’ talent, Logan wanted to break down barriers and have the event be a safe space for all Indigenous people.

Designers sought to

be inclusive as well and the items shown included a rainbow-hued men’s skirt.

“We wanted to also give people opportunities and exposure, and to have this kind of like be out of their comfort zone,” Logan said. “Like I like to call it, taking a healthy risk for people who might be trying modeling for the first time. Who knows, it might be a career path if you enjoy it. You at least have that experience...have something to put in your calling card or your resume.”

For Quenelle, it was an opportunity to do something he loves; occupy the spotlight. Being an emcee for events, “kind of being the center and focal point of events” is a favorite activity, Quenelle said, so he immediately applied when the call went out for local models.

“I enjoyed it a lot,” he said. “There were so many great artists there that I think I got paired with probably just the perfect ones. It was amazing; it seemed like everything flowed the entire night.”

Littleleaf said the show was a first for the Northwest, but she hopes to offer it again next year.

“Oregon has so much to offer and opening up our hearts, homes and opportunities will create connections, build bonds and bring in new networks. This was our first show, being very successful, we will hope to host another next year with possibilities of being even more incredible,” Littleleaf said.

- Featured designers included:
- Aurolyn Stwyer
 - Native Queens Design by Virginia Queen Hedrick
 - WiyeéEpi'im Collective by Lydia Skahan
 - Niteh Clothing by Joshua Sosnoski
 - Afro Curvy Amazonia Designs by Samara Tobeck
 - Mnuwai Ayat (Kind women) by Maria Godines
 - Alicia’s Designs by Alicia Maria
 - Mermery Designs by Dorothy Obie-Sylvia
 - BoujeeIndigenous and Ayayat, a collaboration, by Ame Manon & Keeli Littleleaf
 - Kathleen’s Designs
 - Fish Martinez
 - 3 Generations Beadwork and Beaded Creations by Ussasence
 - Nar Rew Ekar by Shoshoni Hostler
 - Mountain Sheep Designs by Thomicitia ■



Tribal member Fabian Quenelle models a hand painted jacket from Alicia’s Designs during the Northwest/West Coast Indigenous Fashion Show at Spirit Mountain Casino's Event Center on Thursday, July 25.



Tribal member Stacey Runningbird gets lipstick applied by makeup artist Angela Foster as she prepares to be a model in the Northwest/West Coast Indigenous Fashion Show at Spirit Mountain Casino's Event Center.