

Sharing tradition

Grand Ronde Contest Powwow passes culture through generations



PHOTOS BY LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

The Grand Ronde Contest Powwow attracted more than 260 Native dancers.

Contest Powwow royalty enters during the Grand Entry on Saturday afternoon.



Stan Greene (left) and Dakota Upshaw (right) take part in a dance during the Grand Ronde Contest Powwow on Saturday afternoon.

By Lukas Eggen

The Itemizer-Observer

GRAND RONDE — Charles TailFeathers knows he can't get caught up in the moment.

As head judge at Grand Ronde's Contest Powwow, held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, TailFeathers was tasked with ensuring all the judges were ready and prepared to grade more than 260 dancers.

"You have to see the rhythm of the dancers," TailFeathers said. "It's like watching the Olympics. You have to practice it in order to understand all the qualities of the dancers. You have to know the songs and see whether they are starting and stopping on time and the rhythm of their movements."

TailFeathers said he has been a judge off and on for 69 years — experience that is instrumental to being a good judge.

"The key is experience," TailFeathers said. "You have to travel the country and see what's going on over there."

The Contest Powwow attracted participants from around the country, including Oregon, Washington, Nevada and Idaho.

Leah Villa, who took part in the women's traditional, age 18-49 category, has been dancing in the powwow since she was a baby. As she's grown up and traveled away from her home in Grand Ronde, the powwow remains something she looks forward to each year.

"It's good to see all the different people and cultures come together to celebrate as one," Villa said. "There's a lot of joy seeing everyone come together."

As the Grand Ronde Contest Powwow brought together Native American dancers from a variety of tribes, TailFeathers said that taking part is something that is uniquely special, no matter how many years you've done it.

"It's different when you dance," TailFeathers said. "The song is a part of you. When you dance, you're one with the rhythm, no matter what the song is."



Irvin Waskewitch competes in the Golden Age Men category of the Contest Powwow on Saturday.



Native American dancers enter during the Grand Entry on Saturday afternoon.



Patty Young Running Crane dances during the Golden Age Women category on Saturday afternoon.