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Local News

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Pow-wow shares tribe's traditions, dances

By ALFRED DIAZ of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA -- What had once been kept secret was proudly displayed for all to see, as Alvin Huesties donned the dress her great grandmother could not wear in public.

"We..." Huesties said in the plural form, emphasizing her connection to her ancestors, "... weren't allowed to put on our outfits. So all of our outfits were put away and hidden. And we gathered in secret to dance."

But on Saturday, Huesties and 200 other Native Americans, most from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, gathered at Dietrich Dome to dance at the Waluulapum Warriors Pow-Wow.

It was the third time the pow-wow has taken place in the last six years; the first was in 2005 to commemorate the signing of the treaty that established the Umatilla reservation.

"I like the fact that this pow-wow is in Walla Walla because Walla Walla was the ancestral gathering ground many years past," Umatilla tribe member Thomas Morning Owl said. He came with his family. The youngest, his grandchild, was strapped in carrier that was placed on a stroller.



"All my kids were that way," Morning Owl said, referring to the papoose, a tradition of his people.

Also taking part in the pow-wow was Raymond Cree and his family, who sat around a ceremonial drum and watched as Cree's grandson, Trenton, danced. "It's not polite to point," Cree said, trying to indicate where his grandson was with the slight motion of his hand. "He's in the red shirt."

Then the dance ended and it was time for the oldest member of the family to take his place on the gym floor.

"Grandpa, would you like to dance," Cree's son, Jacob, said to his grandfather, Leonard, who slowly rose.

The grandson carefully helped his grandfather prepare for the Golden Age dance, under the observant eyes of his father.

"It's not right son," Cree said, using a modicum of words. Jacob looked at his grandfather's vest, which was donned with four medals earned during World War II. when he fought in the South Pacific in the U.S. Navy.



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Then the grandson realized he had misaligned the buttons. Jacob corrected it and handed the older man a fan for his left hand and a ceremonial staff for his right.

The music of the Golden Age Dance had already begun. Sensing the beat and as if by instinct, the patriarch took his place at the pow-wow, dancing a little slower than the rest.

"The Canadian flag on our staff..." Cree said without pointing to his father, "... is to honor where our name came from."

The 84-year-old grandfather was the oldest of three men dancing. The women's Golden Age Dance would have at least seven dancers.

"Due to the mortality of a lot of our people, the Golden Age has been reduced to 55. It used to be 65, but as you can see that would only leave two," Cree said.

About a half hour later, those 6 years old and under were called to dance.

That is when Huesties came back out, this time leading her 16-month-old granddaughter.

Mania wore a pink dress that was festooned with dozens of conical silver bells. For the first couple of minutes, it seemed that the little girl was trying to do the jingle dance. But toward the end, it was obvious the toddler was more into ambling about than performing.

In generations past, pow-wows would have served as meeting opportunities for tribes during their seasonal hunting and gathering journeys, which ranged from what today is John Day, Ore., to West Richland to La Grande, explained pow-wow organizer Linda Sampson.

"Pow-wows would have been the time that we came together for marriages, trades, games ... You followed the seasons. So that's what you do. We would have moved all over those 6.5 million (acres), not as one person, but as family or bands of people," Sampson said.

For Huesties, pow-wows now serve as a chance to socialize and to introduce her nine grandchildren to the traditional dances. Along with those traditional dances are traditional outfits. And though the deep red dress she wears is far different from the pink and yellow trimmed dress of her granddaughter, they have similarities.

Those 40 silver conical bells each represent a prayer. It was obvious from her silence that the prayers were not to be shared.

"That jingle represents a prayer. There are supposed to be 360. One for every day. She has about 40. When she is older, we will make her a dress with 360." Huesties said.

And each will be sewed on by hand with a family member with a prayer.

Looking at Huesties' red ceremonial outfit with its thousands of beads, the significance of the hundreds of jingling seashells became obvious. And it looked as if there were 360 of them.

The Waluulapum Warriors Pow-Wow continues today at the Walla Walla Community College Dietrich Dome from 1-7 p.m. It is free and open to the public.

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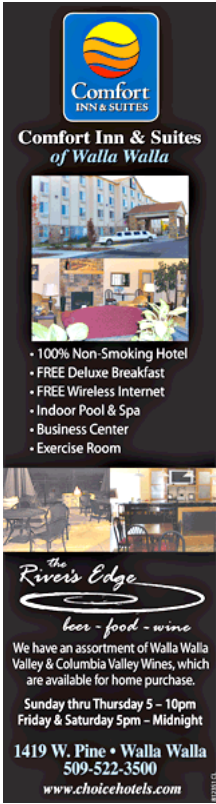
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