

25 YEARS OF CELEBRATION

Native American culture honored at Western's annual Pow Wow

By Sam Dunaway | News Editor

Bells that decorate clothing ring with every step, a drum beat that's so loud that it vibrates the walls. Positive energy radiated from the arena during Multicultural Student Union's 25th annual Pow Wow — the largest annual celebration of Native American culture on Western's campus.

"With the Native American people, we don't have many ways of coming together and celebrating," explained Nick Sixkiller, master of ceremonies for the event and member of the Cherokee of Oklahoma tribe. Sixkiller has been the emcee for Western's annual Pow Wow for nearly a decade.

The Pow Wow provides an opportunity for Native Americans to share various dances from their culture. These dances include both the men's and women's Fast and Fancy Dance, the Jingle Dress Dance and the men's and women's Traditional Dance that, according to Sixkiller, "represents all of our Indian nations."

All dances have a story; the Jingle Dress Dance originated from a Ojibwe man's vision that provided instructions for a dance that would cure his ill daughter. Regalia, or Native American outfits, for the Jingle Dress Dance include rows of metal cones, referred to in the Ojibwe language as 'ziibaaska 'iganan,' that ring with every step. Sixkiller commented that, when the arena is filled with dancers, "it sounds like a rainstorm in Oregon."

Native American dances are fluid and allow an opportunity for personal expression.

"Your vision is in your own head dancing and you just gotta listen to the drum beat," Sixkiller explained. The drum beat represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth and how she gives life to the native people. "There's no one style of dancing. It's what's in your body and how you want to dance this style."

In addition to the entertainment for the 12-hour event on April 28, Native American vendors brought in

handmade items to share their culture with others.

One of the vendors, Tina, is a South American Indian from the Andes. She displayed hand carved wooden flutes, rings made from coconut shells and twisted wire jewelry.

"In the old times, we didn't have electricity, we didn't have anything," said Tina. "So what we learned to do is things by hand. We learned how to weave, we learned how to do jewelry, we learned how to work with the animal furs. We just had the whole time in our hands."

Since she moved to Oregon, she shares her love of working with her hands with her friends and children. She fondly looks back on the days growing up in the Andes.

"It was busy, busy life," Tina remembered, smiling. "It was wonderful."

Pow Wows are not only an opportunity to entertain with song and dance, but they are also a time for Native Americans to gather and educate others on their history. Sixkiller hopes that more people learn about the true story of the Native Americans.

"We're the first persons here on this land and we're ignored. And we can't change it," Sixkiller expressed. "It's just irritating. We're trying to get teachers in schools to talk more about natives in truth rather than what the old history books are talking about."

He explained that one way that people can learn about the culture is attending an event like this.

"I'd like to invite everybody to come to a Pow Wow and learn more about American Indians and not what history has taught them over the years," Sixkiller encouraged.

"I feel like we aren't really shown Native Americans and their culture," said MSU's Social Membership Director and sophomore Gabbie Acevedo-Solis. "It's good to be aware and be informed as well as celebrate."

Acevedo-Solis also encourages individuals to experience the various Native American dances at their annual Pow Wow. She explained that the positive energy on the dance floor spreads throughout the audience and can be felt by everyone; "You have to



Pow Wow performer drums while wearing traditional Native American regalia

Cover photo and photo by PAUL F. DAVIS

CORRECTION

In issue 22, The Western Journal published an article that talks about the Hawaii Pacific Island Club's 12th annual lu'au. It was the club's 11th annual lu'au.

see it for yourself and you'll realize how beautiful it really is."

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