An Outbreak *of* Peace

BY CHRISTIAN ARCE & RAUL RAMIREZ

For a day everything that is good about the world came together in the warm air on the cool manicured soccer field of Southwestern College.

The People were back.

So were the reassuring drums, spirited dancers, exquisite jewelry and intoxicating frybread.

And they were happy.

Even as rockets rained down on Iran, hopefulness permeated The People and their guests. It was an outbreak of peace.

"Not everything in the world is happy this morning, but we can be happy right here today," said Walter Ahhaitty, the philosophical Master of Ceremonies. "We have to remember to be happy because when you are an Indian everything we do is difficult. We sing different, we dance different. Our differences can be difficult, but also things of great beauty."

Diné People (Navajo) urge others to "walk in beauty," and Southwestern's third annual Powwow was a circular promenade of the sublime.

Children celebrated elders, elders celebrated descendants and everyone celebrated those who came before.

"When you raise your eyes and see across the beauty of Mother Earth you can see a sunlit path forward," said Ahhaitty. "It is still there. It is always there."

'WE NEVER LEFT'

Haw Kemyulk, the life-giving Sweetwater River, was flowing again following February rain, reasserting its place as the lifeblood of the region's Kumeyaay People.

"Sometimes you cannot see the river because it is flowing underground, but Mother Earth has her arms around *Haw Kemyulk*," said Barona spiritual leader Bobby Wallace. "Mother Earth has her arms around all of us, even when we are not seen."

This powwow was a coming together and celebration, said Diné activist Sheilah Naajiibah Green. As a young girl Green spent time living in her grandmother's hogan in Sanders, Arizona

POWOW / PG 4

A GRAND OPENING—Southwestern College hosts the first San Diego County powwow of the season.
NICK SINSABAUGH / THE SWC SUN

before moving to Chula Vista. She was a Student of Distinction Award recipient at Southwestern and a much-honored scholar at CSU San Marcos.

Green said local powwows are peaceful celebrations but also acts of defiance.

"We are still here," she said. "No matter what anyone has done or what anyone says, Indigenous people are still here. We never left."

Native Americans have been intentionally undercounted by the U. S. government since 1790, she said. Census counts have "American Indians" at 1.1 percent of the population. Adding People who identify as Native Alaskan boosts the number to 2.9 percent. Green said she is not buying it.

"The government numbers are very misleading," she said. "We are way more than 2 percent. Low census numbers keep us politically weak like we are too small to matter. But the question is the problem. The census should ask who identifies as Indigenous to North and South America. That's a whole different number."

Green said the census numbers would be at least 30 percent if the census modernized its language.

"For years my mother was counted as White," said Green. "My mom is full-blooded Diné."

Ahhaitty agreed. What's in a name matters, he said.

"When I was growing up we were called American Indians, then later Native Americans," he said. "Now we are Indigenous. A lot of folks have come up with a lot of names for us. You got to be careful what you let people call you, how they identify you."

Ahhaitty said he is okay with the term "Indigenous," but prefers to be known as Kiowa.

"I'm Kiowa tribe of Oklahoma," he said. "The People here are Kumeyaay. This is Kumeyaay land. Man, I like to say Kumeyaay! It's kind of like saying Kiowa!"

WARRIORS FOR OUR LAND

Ahhaitty said he also likes to be called a veteran. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps, he said, and is *Semper Fi* to the American military.

"People ask me why so many Indians serve in the military even though we've had a hard time with the U.S. government," he said. "That's easy. This is our land and we fight to defend it. We are warriors for our land and our People. Indigenous People are the highest per capita of any Americans serving in the military. We are great soldiers and Marines."

Powwow leadership was brimming with veterans. Retired Marine Adam Loga greeted every dancer entering the arena. Head Gourd Dancer Mike Diaz is a decorated Navy and Army veteran. Eagle Staff Carrier Richard Decrane served with honor in the U.S. Navy for 15 years. His Navajo name is "The Warrior Who Has Returned to His People."

As dancers made ready to enter the arena, elder Chuck Cadotte asked for a blessing.

"Godfather," he prayed, "please bless everyone dancing, drumming and singing today. They are all beautiful just as you made them beautiful."

Drums thundered to announce the traditional powwow Grand Entrance, a pulsating stream of committed dancers and traditional regalia flowing into the arena as the river Haw Kemyulk pushes through the nearby Sweetwater Valley.

"*Hay ya*!" hollered Ahhaitty, the traditional Native greeting to convey happiness and gratitude. "*A'ho* (thank you) drummers and dancers!

Former Miss Teen San Diego and Hollywood film actress Myra Mondregon returned home to carry a flag honoring legendary American Indian Movement leader Dennis Banks, who died in 2017.

"I'm honored to be here," she said. "My father is Indigenous and I am proud to be an Indigenous person. I grew up in Bonita, so it is great to be able to participate in a powwow at Southwestern College."

Mondregon has a degree in civil engineering and hopes to



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INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING—Powwows spread their arms wide in the uniting philosophy of the Pan-Nativism Movement. Indigenous People of all tribes and nations are invited to celebrate together and freely use any Native cultural traditions.

Haw Kemyulk honors generous river spirit of life and giving

BY CHRISTIAN ARCE, RAUL RAMIREZ & YANELLI ZAVINA ROBLES

Haw Kemyulk means "Sweet Water" in the Ipay language of the Kumeyaay Old Ones. She is a generous spirit of life running from the mountain Creators through the hills and valleys of San Diego County all the way to the ocean.

Southwestern College's newest learning community is named for the great river that runs its final miles through the college district. *Haw Kemyulk* strives to bring new life to the region's Native American students.

"It is so good to see Southwestern College establish a learning community for Native American students," said Diné activist Sheilah Naajiibah Green, an SWC alumna and Student of Distinction Award recipient in 2009. "I was alone because there were no programs or organizations for Native Americans. I was fortunate and found a community at the student newspaper."

Haw Kemyulk is a cohort-style program where Native students move together through college. They take classes together and build supportive relationships by spending after-class time in their second-floor space in the new Student Center adjacent to Puente, Umoja, Bayan, Chel and Sangram. Students are encouraged to engage in "cultural enriching activities that honor Indigenous knowledge and identity." *Haw Kemyulk* students are eligible for priority registration, counseling and leadership opportunities.



SWEET BY ANY NAME—Haw Kemyulk are Ipay words for 'Sweet Water,' the ancient Kumeyaay name for the river. Spaniards many years later named the river 'Agua Dulce.' Kumeyaay elders insist it is no coincidence. PHOTO COURTESY OF SWEETWATER AUTHORITY

Dr. Guadalupe Corona, director of Student Equity and Services, oversees the area.

"We are very happy to have a new learning community to support Native American and Indigenous students," she said. "The students of the learning communities support each other and collaborate on projects."

Former SWC NASA Club President Lucia Napolez advocated for a Native learning community and Barona spiritual leader Bobby Wallace came up with the name. Native Americans have spelled *Haw Kemyulk* many different ways, according to Assistant Professor of Native American Studies David Salomon, but most Kumeyaay in the region seem to have pronounced it very much the same way. Wallace and regional Native American intellectuals like Jane Dumas helped to lock in the spellings and pronunciations of the previously unwritten Ipay language in about 2008 when they published a dictionary, Salomon said.

San Diego County is home to 18 federally recognized reservations, the most in the United States. Though data is sketchy, evidence suggests that Native American students from the reservations did not start to attend local colleges in measurable numbers until the 1990s. Most educators and Indigenous leaders agree that Native Americans are severely underrepresented in higher education.

Corona said she hopes the Native American Students and Allies Club (NASA) will collaborate with *Haw Kemyulk*. Powwow Master of Ceremonies Walter Ahhaitty agreed.

"Indigenous organizations need to work together and not get isolated," he said. "Southwestern College has a strong NASA and it needs to stay strong. A new learning community should help. We've had NASAs all over San Diego County fall apart and fade away. Can't let that happen here."

Green agreed.

"I think the new learning community will add to the synergy that is growing at Southwestern College," she said. "We need more Native Americans with college degrees and Indigenous students need to feel connected and supported."

use her education and love for the environment to help provide clean water for people around the globe.

"It all fits together," she said. "Indigenous People are the original stewards of the Earth and its water. We are relearning what they knew."

Powwows are famously inclusive and have become more prevalent in the wake of the Pan-American Movement which encourages North America's nearly 1,000 nations, tribes and bands to celebrate together and embrace each other's customs, music, regalia and spirituality. They are also multigenerational and actively work to develop leadership in children and teens. Head Tiny Tot Girl Alessi Murphy, 3, is a member of the powwow's Head Staff, along with Head Tiny Tot Boy Jacob Mato Wasaka Fixica.

RETURNING FROM THE ROCKS

In 1987 the renowned anthropologist Dr. Florence Shipek published her seminal book "Pushed Into the Rocks" about the forced relocation of Kumeyaay and Ipay People from the San Diego County coastline into the barren rocky foothills that made survival difficult. Barona spiritual leader Bobby Wallace said his People are pushing back.

"We are trying to incorporate more Native students into Southwestern College and make them feel that this is a place they can call their home," he said. "We haven't been out of the bushes for too long. (This is an) opportunity to feel comfortable about getting off the hill and getting an education."

David Salomon, assistant professor of Native American Studies, has been the energy and academic heft of a new movement at Southwestern College to recognize and celebrate the Indigenous People of San Diego County. Its powwows have provided fuel.

"We want to see it go on (and reach) our 10th annual and our 30th annual," he said. "We'd like to continue a tradition here on campus because it opens doors for all of our Native People. It's about opening doors and letting them know, 'Hey, Southwestern College cares about the Native community.' And that's our huge goal here."

INVITATIONS

Photographer Ines Cervantes got a taste of powwow kindness as she crawled around on her stomach to get the low angle shots that make Native dancers look well framed and flattering.

"Everyone was so nice," she said. "I was laying on the ground for photos and everyone was really nice about it. One of the performers saw that I looked red (from the 93-degree heat) and gave me a little coffee bean candy to chew on."

Whether the bean had magical properties or the spirit of kindness was kindled inside her, Cervantes said the candy instantly made her feel better. Taking photos at the powwow was inspiring and enjoyable, she said.

"I really loved the designs and colors of the (regalia)," she said. "The singing was beautiful and it seemed to make people so happy. It was great to see so many people so deeply engaged in their culture. It's truly beautiful."

Diné activist Green has two sons who are competitive dancers and young Native American scholars.

"I am thankful for this powwow because it brings my boys and other Indian children to a college campus," she said. "It makes them aware that college is out there for them in the future."

A full moon hung as a single luminescent pearl in the gradient colors of the evening sky. Sheilah Naajiibah (Woman Who Went to War Many Times) reveled in the peaceful beauty of the sunset and the satisfaction that her boys had danced well and had fun.

Angel Gonzalez, Madelyn Batuyong, Arianna Antillon, Ines Cervantes and Joshua Whitehead contributed to this article.



A BLESSING TO BE HERE—Spiritual ceremonies from several Native traditions asked for peace, health, well-being and happiness for all. ANGEL GONZALEZ / THE SWC SUN



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Red Tipi is a traveling reminder of missing and murdered women

BY ARIANNA ANTILLON, CHRISTIAN ARCE, NATALIA RIVERA BANUET & RAUL RAMIREZ

Teyana Viscarra was holding forth and holding space when she suddenly started to cry.

Sometimes even a fierce warrior has to shed tears.

"It can be a lot to think about," she said. "I still have trouble getting around the enormity of it."

Viscarra is an energetic advocate for the tens of thousands of Native American women and girls missing and presumed murdered. It is America's most deadly epidemic of violence and its least known, she said. Government and law enforcement fail to count the vast majority of the disappeared. Record keeping has been negligent, but the estimates are shocking. It is likely that as many as 10,000 Indigenous women and girls are kidnapped, sexually assaulted and murdered every year.

Viscarra said too few tears are shed for "our beautiful and vulnerable sisters."

"Indigenous women can disappear without a trace and then days and weeks go by before they are reported missing," she said. "Thousands just fall through the cracks. Many live on remote reservations where tribal police are overmatched. City and county law enforcement do not consider these women to be under their jurisdictions. They go unreported and uninvestigated. The FBI rarely gets involved."

A WARRIOR FOR WOMEN— Teyana Viscarra of Chula Vista is a high-energy, forceful activist battling the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She leads Way of the Sacred Mountain, an advocacy group for mistreated women.

Advocates with the Urban Indian Health Institute say Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls disappear three times – in life, in the news media and in the data. Numbers are all over the place. Notoriously, in 2016 there were 5,712 cases of missing Indigenous women reported in the U.S. The Department of Justice logged only 116.

Efforts by Biden Administration Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland – the only Native American to ever hold the position – to improve coordination between federal law enforcement, state agencies and tribal police were dismantled by the Trump Administration.

"We are pretty much flying blind," said Norm Sands, who along with Viscarra heads the Chula Vista-based Native American advocacy organization Way of the Sacred Mountain.

Sands, Viscarra and supporters created the Red Tipi, a visual representation of the crisis. A full-sized replica of a Plains Indian tipi, the bright crimson color is to attract spirits. White handprints represent the missing. Some of the hands on the tipi are prints by family of kidnapped and murdered women or girls.

Like the AIDS Quilt, the Red Tipi is a public exhibit inscribed with private messages including, "Breezy, you are loved. You did not deserve this."

Viscarra said the tipi is a healing prayer as well as a call to action.

"We travel with the Red Tipi to hold space and educate," she said. "Most people don't know anything about missing and murdered women. I think people would want to help do something if they knew the situation."

Way of the Sacred Mountain volunteers post up the Red Tipi at powwows like Southwestern's, public events, in front of police stations and on mountaintops. Holding space is not easy, Viscarra said.

"Sometimes we have hundreds of people join us on prayer runs or events, sometimes it's just Norm and me," she said. "It does not matter the size of the crowd. The important thing is to hold the space and remember our sisters."

Powwow Master of Ceremonies Walter Ahhaitty and Barona spiritual leader Bobby Wallace offered prayers for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls from the dance arena. Cherokee activist Nico Johnson was one of the many who spoke up for the missing.

"Women like Teyana who fight violence against women are warriors," he said. "It is a cause that needs lots more attention from the good people in our country."