

ESA HQ holds 20th annual American Indian Heritage Month celebration

By Chris Britton | Nov. 14, 2018



More than 100 ESA staff gathered together to celebrate the 20th annual American Indian Heritage Month in Capitol View I in Olympia last Tuesday, November 6, 2018, and

experienced American Indian food, crafts, dancing, singing, music, and storytelling.

This year's theme is *Honor the Past. Be the Future.*

The festivities opened with a lunch that included smoked salmon, chili for Indian Tacos, pumpkin pie, and fry bread, which can be eaten alone or served with toppings such as: honey, powdered sugar, jam or made into a taco.



Special thanks to the cooks who prepared the food for the American Indian Heritage Celebration lunch:



Stephanie Silberlicht (DCS employee), Dr. Marla Conwell, Dr. Mary DuPuis, Tierra Garrety, Heather Hoyle, Alex Bagaforo, Reba VanBrunt, Lisa Vasquez (DCS employee), Angel VanBrunt (seated). Not pictured: Ann Bailie (DCS employee).



Arts and crafts of American Indians

As ESA staff ate, they listened to presentations by Vickie Era Pankretz, an Alutiiq Indian from Alaska, and Dana'e Marshall, a member of the Navajo Nation who is also involved with the 7generations Intertribal Culture Family that is a local Urban Intertribal group here in the Pacific Northwest. Each woman spoke about their involvement with their Native American culture while discussing the various American Indian arts and crafts they were displaying at their tables.

Vickie Pankretz, Alutiiq Indian

According to Pankretz, there are currently 229 recognized tribes in Alaska—as opposed to treaty tribes—which are divided up into 12 regions in that state. At least three of those tribes are Alutiiq. As a result of all these tribes, Pankretz described that there is a great deal of cultural crossover, with each tribe influencing the other. "Our tribes are hungry to get back to their culture," she explained.



Pankretz also contrasted the differences in values between American Indians and Western culture: "Elders are still held in really high respect. In [Western] society our elders are kind of pushed to the side ... I'm glad to see that our elders are still held in high regard." She went on to describe the practice of how Indian youths and elders routinely spend an entire week together to bond with one another, to learn and value one another.

When discussing the various American Indian art and crafts, Pankretz discussed the materials used to create them, which include porcupine quills, cedar, birch bark and a coastal sea grass native to the Alaskan coast, called ryegrass. She had a number of beautiful hand-crafted baskets on display, including several her mother made.



Arts and crafts of American Indians (continued)



Dana'e Marshall, Navajo Nation

Dana'e Marshall hosted another table of personal cultural items that she makes and uses with the 7generations Intertribal Culture family. They travel to sing and dance for ceremony as well as social Coast Salish events that include the Annual Tribal Canoe Journey, the Evergreen Longhouse Drum Circle and many Urban Intertribal events within Thurston, Pierce and King counties for prevention and recovery wellness, and cultural awareness.

Some of the items displayed on her table included: Wool regalia –made with the Puyallup Tribe, cedar hats woven by Squaxin and Nisqually Tribal members, Canoe Journey regalia sewn by a Muckleshoot Canoe family member, drums made by the Canadian-Puyallup Johnny family, cedar rattles, and dance paddles made by Dana'e and the 7generations group. The display also included a variety of her own beadwork, including medallions, earrings and bracelets.

Dana'e, a Washington state employee for the past 25-plus years, expressed how thankful she was to live in this era when she can proudly display and discuss these sacred cultural items and Native regalia, as there was a point in history when Natives could not publicly gather for Potlatch, Blessing ceremonies, or even wear their regalia. There was a time prior to 1972, when Native Americans "had to hide their heritage for the safety of their families—no rattles, no singing, no prayers, no ceremonies, no regalia."

Marshall stated, "It's a good day to honor an invite from Washington state to publicly discuss and share some intertribal culture and I welcome any questions and we'll learn together."

She also described how most American Indian history is not written down; it's passed down verbally and through the tradition of dance, singing, art and music. Many of the ceremonies are sacred and consequently not recorded. Several of the items on her table were gifts presented to her for witnessing events such as Traditional Naming ceremonies, Honoring Elders and Ancestors, and Waking of the Canoes, to mention a few.

Marshall discussed a recent event that took place at UW Stadium this year—where an Intertribal group of Quileute, Lummi, 7generations, Quinault, and Indigenouz PlaceMakerz were invited to sing and dance as part of the Special Olympics opening ceremonies—which included blessing the floor and singing together as one with the other tribes present. Marshall's table displayed a photo of herself in traditional Coastal regalia with Gov. Jay Inslee.



Traditional songs and dances of American Indians

Following their presentations, ESA staff were treated to a performance by the *Wa He Lut* Coastal Drum and Dance Group.



Led by Misty Kalama Archer, language and culture coordinator for the dance school, and Kendall Archer, the group filed into the room singing, dancing and playing ceremonial drums, dressed in American Indian Coastal regalia.

The *Wa He Lut* Indian School is located on the Nisqually Delta. They sing songs that reflect the

Salish Sea Culture, and the students helped make the Native American red and black regalia they wore, sewing and assembling the clothing themselves. The regalia was decorated with orca whales and other animals, and refers to the traditional American Indian story of creation, which tells of how plants and animals showed people how to live in harmony with that creation.

The *Wa He Lut* Drum and Dance Group were a diverse group, representing several different tribes and tribal nations, including the Nisqually Tribe, Quinault Indian Nation, Crow Tribe, Puyallup Tribe, Skokomish Tribe, Yakama Nation and others.

The drum and dance group performed a variety of different traditional songs and dances, which Misty Archer said came from Billy Frank Jr.'s family, the Skokomish Tribe, and her own family. "Each song and dance is a gift," she said.



"The children help keep the American Indian culture alive by stepping forward to find their voice," said Kendall Archer, who performed and led the boys in a number of traditional American Indian dances.

Some of the songs they performed included:

- *Eagle Lightning Song*—From the S'Klallams it's akin to a national anthem, and speaks of the warrior's desire for peace and harmony.
- *Salmon Song*—Traditionally sung at the Nisqually River, girls dance with a movement that mimics the movement of the waves, while the boys dance in the middle, mimicking the migration of the salmon.
- *The Women's Honor Song*—This song honors women within the tribe and observes the men's responsibility to protect the women in their tribe.
- *Remember our Waters, Remember our Mountains*—a song and dance to remind us that we are interconnected with our environment.

At the conclusion of the celebration the performers bid the group farewell in their native language and, dancing and singing the Paddle Song, filed out of the room, leaving us a little more enlightened, and significantly more enriched.

Resources to learn more about American Indians

[Learn more about National American Indian Heritage Month.](#)

[View Gov. Jay Inslee's Proclamation.](#)

[View President Trump's Proclamation.](#)

[View U.S. Census Facts for American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month 2018.](#)

View the complete Bureau of Indian Affairs list of all [573 Federally Recognized Indian Tribes.](#)

