

CELEBRATING WASHINGTON'S FIRST PEOPLES

Join us Mondays and Wednesdays through Nov. 21 as we take a look at the contributions — past and present — of Washington's First Peoples.

FAMILY

The Navajo have a saying about people who misbehave: "They act like they don't have any relatives." It is difficult to find anyone in Washington state's 29 federally recognized tribes who fits this category. In fact, large and extended families are the norm among Washington state's First Peoples. Family relationships are strong and important, sometimes cutting across several different tribes. As a result of the historic confederations imposed on the tribes during treaty-making time, coupled with the numerous intermarriages that continue to take place, a person may be descended from several tribes and related to people on many reservations.

American Indian families love to gather together at family celebrations and holiday events just like everyone else. Important events include naming ceremonies, birthdays, weddings, funerals and graduations. These celebrations are times to share stories, catch up on current political events, and laugh. Joking and teasing play a big part in their humor. While American Indians have often been *stereotyped* in movies and television shows as stoic and even frightening, this is not the way they are in real life.

There are also traditional American Indian events where people gather. Powwows are immensely popular across all of America. Traditionally, powwows were held beginning in early spring and wrapped up in fall. They were held outdoors underneath arbors to protect dancers from the hot sun. Typically, powwows span a weekend, allowing time for people to travel from their homes and camp alongside each other in tents or tepees. These days, powwows may also be held inside or in conjunction with a conference or meeting. Honoring the numerous native veterans who have served in American wars is always central

to any event. Honor Guards are central to the opening of powwow, carrying in the American flag and eagle staff. Often, people will wear their military uniforms adorned with eagle feathers.

Rodeos, a western tradition often thought of as belonging to cowboys, were always a common activity among many American Indians. Of course, owning and riding horses is more popular among tribes found in eastern Washington, such as the Colville Tribes, Spokane Tribe and Yakama Nation, than those in the Puget Sound area. Oftentimes, powwows and rodeos are combined into one event.

Sports also bring families together from different parts of the state. Basketball, softball, golf, tennis — you name, and American Indians play it. Tournaments, sometimes held in memory of someone who has died, are times when people come together to enjoy a sport and catch up with relatives and friends from other reservations.

Families also gather, sometimes returning from their urban homes back to the reservation, for ceremonies and celebrations. Different tribes celebrate events differently depending upon their location and traditions. These ceremonies may include marking the catch of the first salmon, hunting the first elk and the gathering of roots and huckleberries. Some tribes like to host treaty days to commemorate the signing of their treaty.

Throughout the Pacific Northwest, gathering for potlatches is a longstanding tradition. In older times, families or clans would demonstrate how wealthy they were by how much was given to the guests. The potlatch also included a feast and could last several days. When American Indian religions were banned, potlatch equipment was confiscated, with many of the beautiful bowls, spoons and ceremonial objects ending up in museums. Many tribes have since sought the repatriation of these *cultural patrimony* items. Today, the tradition of the potlatch continues, often in conjunction with naming ceremonies, weddings or other special events. Similar to

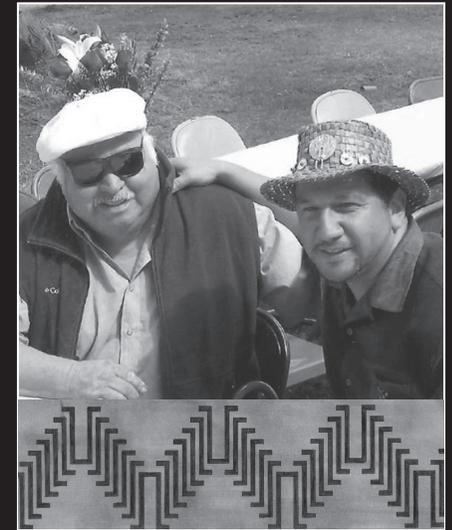
a potlatch are giveaways, which are a big part of powwows and other celebrations.

It is not uncommon to find native children being raised by their grandparents or other relatives. Unfortunately, there are a disproportionately high number of native children who live in foster care. American Indian children make up 2.1 percent of the general child population but 7.7 percent of the children in foster care. However, not all of these children are from Washington state tribes. Many American Indians from other parts of the country come to Seattle and other urban areas, seeking employment and better economic opportunities. When things don't work out, there are few resources besides the state for them to turn to when they are in need.

Participation in traditional events offers American Indians a vital method for staying connected to their tribe. It is a reminder of who they are now and the people who came before them, and it ensures that future generations will also be able to enjoy traditional benefits and continue the native way of life.

ACTIVITIES

1. How do you define "family?" Using the contents from today's Seattle Times, create a piece of art that illustrates your own definition of family and its relevance in your own life.
2. This issue of CELEBRATING WASHINGTON'S FIRST PEOPLES references the stereotype of American Indians as "stoic and even frightening." What is a stereotype and how might they impact a culture? What are some stereotypes of the group to which you identify? Discuss your answers with your classmates. Then, look through today's Seattle Times for images and phrases that play into the stereotypes your class discussed. How can you challenge these stereotypes individually and as a community?



Phillip Hillaire and his father — both members of the Lummi Nation

PHILLIP HILLAIRE

Phillip Hillaire is an advocate for Portland's art and cultures, a student and consultant event planner. Phillip comes from a very large family and has numerous brothers and sisters, including Darrell Hillaire, who previously served as chairman of the Lummi Nation. He is also a relative of Mary Ellen Hillaire, one of the first native faculty members of The Evergreen State College.

"Family is a big part of who I am today, and my journey in life is to take care of our culture, because it's woven into our history as well as today. 'Never be idle, always stay busy, find something to do.' (That's what) my Aunt Fan James would say to us as young people, and today I always promote this. She used to tell us, 'We have so much talent and skills, and it's sad when our youth get bored.' I always think of her when I do good things for the people."

