

news from **native** california



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editor's notes

BY THE TIME you read this, spring will have sprung, as my son's preschool teacher always used to say. Even now the residential streets near our Berkeley office are lined with blooming cherry trees whose pale pink blossoms find their way to the rooftops of cars, the sidewalks, and other quiet overlooked places in need of beauty. We live in a modern world, but the seasons don't stop changing, and with each change comes a sense of freshness, hope, and inevitability.

This issue of *News from Native California* reflects that sense: after the devastating 2009 southern California fire that claimed the lives of two firefighters and forced the closure of Haramokngna American Indian Cultural Center, the Angeles National Forest is starting to recover, as revealed in Corina Roberts's breathtaking photographs. After many hours of volunteer labor, Haramokngna has finally reopened and is planning a full summer of community activities. Young people throughout the state are learning the ways of their elders, from language to singing to storytelling, as evidenced by the great impact of leaders like Preston Arrow-weed and Katherine Saubel. And the creative arts continue to evolve and transform, especially in the new paintings by frequent *News* contributor and nationally known artist Frank LaPena.

We introduce a new young Native American writer in this issue, Gilberto Daniel Rodriguez (Mexica/Nahuatl). An urban studies student at the San Francisco Art Institute and a program associate at the Seva Foundation's Native American Community Health Program, Daniel reached out to us to help publicize Seva's work with the California Indian community. The program operates three traditional food revitalization projects in Inupiaq villages in Alaska, Yankton Dakota communities in South Dakota, and the International Friendship House in Oakland. His article about the Friendship House's annual harvest dinner resonates with the energy and compassion of youth and the warmth of a community working together to improve its members' physical and emotional health. We would love to be in touch with other young people throughout the state, and we welcome submissions of all kinds. Tell us what you are up to, what's going on in your world, what's important to you! While we aren't yet on Facebook or Twitter, we do enjoy receiving email and snail mail—and always respond—so drop us a line. We look forward to hearing from you.

Margaret Dubin, margaret@heydaybooks.com

ON THE COVER: Katherine Saubel wearing a Cahuilla-style hat woven by Abe Sanchez (Purepecha). Photo by Ira Nowinski.

BACK COVER: Frank LaPena, "Time and Seasons of Renewal." Acrylic on board, 2010. Photo courtesy Hammerfriar Gallery.



A FEAST FOR THE COMMUNITY

Gilberto Daniel Rodriguez

THE INTERTRIBAL FRIENDSHIP HOUSE (IFH) in the San Antonio District of East Oakland held its annual Harvest Dinner on Saturday, November 20, 2010. The foods prepared and presented were as diverse as the myriad hosts gathered. Among those celebrating were artisans from the Aju-mawi Band of the Pit River Nation, Pomo Nation Dancers, past tribal chairmen Doug Duncan from Robinson Rancheria and Thomas Brown from Elem Indian Colony, and hundreds of IFH members from the five-county-wide Bay Area Native American/Alaska Native community IFH serves, in addition to health organization representatives such as Seva Foundation's Native American Community Health program, the Northern California chapter of the Society for Public Health Education, and the Native American Health Center.

Ceremonies where a community gathers together as one family in sharing resources, lifestyles, and stories serve to address unique health challenges, curbing the burden of diabetes and the top diabetes-related health issues in our community. By evening, tables were spread with a variety of healthy dishes, including baked salmon, wild rice from the White Earth Reservation paired with toasted pecans and flat leaf parsley, thick and savory deer stew, and signature Diné green chili. Laughing voices reached clouded skies while the fire outside outlined a host of entering families and running children. Every way you went, you felt warmth.

The feast itself was in part the culmination of hard work by the Friendship House gardeners, tilling and laboring during the spring and summer

months in IFH's own garden. This year alone, IFH has seen forty-seven crops take off, with more than seven hundred volunteers, mostly youth, helping tend to the garden. Winter vegetables and bulbs are now taking the place of heirloom corn, strawberries, and other summer crops in the raised beds outside the entrance here, one of the oldest Native American centers in the nation. It was a blessing to have a portion of the food being served that night derived from the efforts of all those involved in restoring food access, while above us the first downpour of the season greeted our occasion with sacred and cleansing rains.

Under IFH Executive Director Carol Wahpepah's leadership, in addition to the 728-square-foot garden there are now intergenerational health activities, including ones focused on cooking and fitness. There is increasing recognition of the garden's role in strengthening the Bay Area Native community's physical health, too, given the high incidence of diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and other health issues that disproportionately affect the community.

All of the traditional food efforts are grassroots and have been given momentum with support from Seva Foundation's Native American Community Health Program. Connecting partners to help improve health conditions for Native Americans is also part of the mission of the Northern California Chapter of the Society for Public Health Education. Shreya Desai, a delegate from the chapter, worked a table at the dinner administering IFH surveys that asked community



members to share their vision of a healthy foods distribution program for this year.

Walking inside Intertribal Friendship House, community members sat opposite the entrance registering attendants and gifting each new and returning member with packages of sage and cedar from the IFH garden. The spiritual aspect of recovering from illness is intrinsic to the Native American community and well represented in the garden. Northern California Hoopa tobacco and lemon balm species sat in the herb garden where the sage and cedar were gathered; plants that serve as medicinal alternatives are now easily accessible to the community.

Back inside the hall, the Pomo Nation Dancers two-stepped back and forth, sharing ceremonial song and dance. Native pride tattoos of eagles and elders flashed on dark colored bodies moving in syncopated rhythm to the beat of three drums.

Pomo Nations Dancers deliver blessings at the Intertribal Friendship House's annual Harvest Dinner in November 2010. Photo by Carol Wahpepah.

The spirited voices and music lifted me, affirming my conviction in the work being done for the betterment of each other as one strong and resilient community. As we face the challenges of an industrial food system damaging the health of our people and environment, we are actively moving forward on a path to determine our own future while keeping tradition close to our heart: the core of our survival as indigenous people. ▼

Gilberto Daniel Rodriguez (Mexica/Nahuatl) is an Urban Studies student at San Francisco Art Institute and a program associate at Seva Foundation's Native American Community Health Program.

