

RICH LESSONS



Above, from left: Dietrich Peters (Cosa Tance) shows off a bustle used during dancing in his tradition, and Earth Ways campers are guided in making medicine pouches.

EMBER HOLMAN / THE CHRONICLE

Earth Ways campers dive into Indigenous culture

BY EMBER HOLMAN
THE CHRONICLE

COTTAGE GROVE— It's impossible to be an expert on American history without digging into Indigenous culture. Such lessons aren't only on a page, though; Singing Creek Educational Center (SCEC) is teaching children of the community that Native culture continues to flourish.

SCEC is a non-profit organization dedicated to inspiring community members to appreciate the nature around them and the history that it holds.

This year, SCEC added Earth Ways Camp to its roster. The camp was located at Prospector's Park in Cottage Grove and taught campers about the Kalapuya and other Native tribes.

Nine children between the ages of 7 and 11 finished camp last week with a much clearer idea of Native culture. Several Indigenous speakers came to teach a wide variety of topics, including basket weaving, medicine pouches, traditional regalia, and more.

In 2007, Karen Rainsong, director of SCEC, founded the program at the point where her two passions meet. "I've always

loved kids, and working with kids, and I discovered that I have a passion for history as well," Rainsong said. "I just saw a real need in Oregon to put the two together to make history come alive for kids so I started doing this."

SCEC began its journey in 2007 as the Alvord Farm and Museum. After seven years, the program had to move to Junction City, where it morphed into a nonprofit educational center. Four years later, the program moved again to Cottage Grove and has continued to grow.

Members of SCEC work hard to serve the community, venturing as far as Portland to share their classes and activities with new audiences, and reached 3,200 children in 2023. There are also several local programs such as the Acorn Circle Library program, which provides free indigenous education for children and adults, partnerships with history-rich locations to lead school and group field trips, and summer camps for children ages 6-11.

Dietrich "Dietz" Peters is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Dietrich Peters is his English name, however, his given name is Cosa Tance, meaning

Sky Dancer. Peters has been working with Rainsong for two years at cultural encampment events, and was one of the guest speakers at the Earth Ways Camp last week.

This type of partnership, "is a great way to spread the information of Native culture and to get people more involved into knowing about how Native culture is still living and thriving, it's not just in a book anymore," Peters said.

Rainsong reinforces this idea with hands-on tactics. Last week, campers learned about dentalium shells, which were once used as currency in the Columbia River area, by making necklaces out of dentalium shells and glass beads, and listened to beautiful Native American flute music while painting flutes to make them their own.

Claudia Hernandez-Heckathorn, a parent of one of the campers, is happy with her choice in summer camp. "It's important for Leon to have connection to our native roots," she said. "I'm happy and excited that they're learning ... They made this cool mat, and this cool necklace, out of basket weaving material, which is stuff that I never learned to do, so Leon being able to learn is [amazing]."