Nespelem News Notes

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Nespelem Millpond Days a Big Success

By Tim Schell

An idea voiced by a few individuals in recent years got a boost toward reality when representatives of the 21st Century Learning Center met with the Nespelem Town Council in early March.

Earl Antone, community coordinator, outlined and sought support for summer youth projects, one of which was an activities day, including a parade.

That sparked the interest of community members from throughout the Nespelem Valley. A late March organizational meeting ended up being more of a list of what could actually be done.

Barbara Aripa noted, "This won't be the town's first parade."

That was when we realized we had the weight of history on us, and we had a chance to revive a tradition: a summer gathering and celebration on what is now the platted town site of Nespelem.

Although the Nespelems and San Poil inhabited the valley since time before history, the earliest photographic records we found were by the subagency doctors, Edward H. Latham and Frank Avery, and Okanogan-based photographer Frank S. Matsura.

Matsura's 1903 image of the mule races and Latham's photograph from a hillside vantage point of the encampment circle made us realize we had a reputation to live up to.

Other aspects of history developed: opening the south half of the reservation to Mineral entry (1889) and homesteading (1915); the platting of the BIA Agency two miles south of town (1912); platting of the town (1913); the horse parade on Main Street (1917); the winding of the Maypole, with the upright grand on the ballfield and children's parade (1931).

Ivan Payne and Del Ostenberg ride in the Nespelem Millpond Days parade, accompanied by a certain famous bear named Smokey.

By the time the town incorporated (1934) and the area was becoming a bedroom suburb for workers on the Grand Coulee Dam construction, there was no space for the encampment circle. The town formally declared Mayday as the major cure celebration.

By the time the building boom was finished and the center of commerce had moved south, so was the observed town holiday.

Possible schemes became plans, and plans became feasible or tossed out. Rena Dick informed us on May

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Le Rena Dick. and her horse are dressed in full regalia while riding in the Millpond Days Parade. More parade photos on page 28.

Nespelem Millpond Days

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Day 2004 this is the town's 70th anniversary: more weight of history, more chances of life for a civic celebration.

Earl Antone became chairman of a formal committee. When the group brainstormed for names, the obvious moniker was realized—"Millpond Days"—because since at least 1901, a stretch of the Nespelem River has had a pond. The War Department built a saw and grist mill, Whyatt & Duncan built a sawmill, a diversion dam for irrigation was built, and swimmers and fishers have built a dam from river rock, always calling it the Millpond.

Anyone here who has learned to swim, logged, farmed, fished, caught water skippers or took chances has memories of the Millpond.

To celebrate this year, the parade duties were claimed by Val Vargas-Thomas. Billie Leith organized the 3-on-3 basketball tournament, Eldon Wilson knew all the particulars about scheduling a 3K run and vendors were sought by Rena and Earl. I jumped at the chance to put together a historical display, and we knighted Jim Smith as head of security.

The committee clicked, not only by great efforts on their own assignments, but in supporting and providing resources for other tasks and venues.

Our first day starts Friday, June 18, 2004. The fishing tank is stocked. The hoops are up, and players arrive to practice and show off. Don McClure sets up to sell his book "The Homesteader's Son." Tacos are being sold.

The tournament begins. People are claiming park benches and, to our amazement, we notice the town initial—the "N" made of boulders on Jackson's Hill—has been straightened and re-painted white, thanks to the efforts of the Fish & Wildlife summer youth workers.

As it becomes dusk, disc jockey James Ives plays country western to hip-hop on the empty courts, with some dancing, visiting and listening, and some Karaoke. As the blue ribbon of sky outlines the western skyline, the last song is "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," sung by Twila Monaghan.

On Saturday, June 19, the 115 runners in the 3K race take off at 8 a.m.Breakfast is served at the Community Activity Center, parade entries start arriving, including scooters, motorbikes, golf carts, stock cars, vintage cars, pickups, emergency vehicles, service vehicles, and tow trucks—one of them hauling a police rig, dogs, horses, floats, marching children, clowns, royalty and grand marshals. People claim shady spots for watching.

The three divisions of marshals nominated by community members were youth (Nespelem championship girls basketball team), community activists (Nancy Armstrong-Montes and Dennis Jackson) and elders (Yvonne Moses and John Grant). The surprise entries were the five vehicles entering from traffic before the Nespelem Band entered the parade route.

The parade was huge and entertaining, with treats of wrapped candy or water balloons.

The afternoon kept up the pace. There was the tournament, vendors, the historical exhibit in the town hall community room, games, face-painting and door prizes.

Before suppertime, it was complete—and just right!

The Millpond committee had done it, but not alone. The efforts of Mayor Colleen Leskinen and her staff, Yogi McClung, Sandy Atchison and LJ Marchand had the route ready and the byways shaped up and the town hall repainted.

The Colville Tribal Council, the Steps and Cart grants, Colville Tribal Services Corp. and Margie Gallaher provided funds for the celebration.

The committee is on vacation, but only for a few days. We have got the summer of 2005 to get ready for. "Millpond Days 2." ■

Thought for the month: "Timing has a lot to do with the outcome of a rain dance."

Thanks to everyone who made "Millpond Days" special.
Electric Bill