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Columbia Gorge Arts & Culture Alliance

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Discover The Secrets:

The River People Celebrate in Lyle, Washington

Columbia Gorge Arts & Culture Discovery Month is May 2011

Lyle, WA (February 16, 2011) – Two large circles of dancers move in unison to the beat of Native American drummers and singers. Some dancers are wearing the regalia of traditional fancy dancers. Others are dressed casually for a day in the park. Whatever their regalia, the dancers make Lyle, Washington vibrant with celebration. These are River People – Native and non-Native neighbors of the Mid-Columbia Gorge. The Third Annual River Peoples Cultural Exchange (RPCE) celebrates the love of all these people for the Columbia River, its beauty and its bounty.

Join the celebration Saturday, May 14th from 12-5:00 pm at Lyle Park Place on Washington Highway 14 between Third and Fourth Streets. Enjoy traditional music and exhibition dancing as well as the opportunity to participate in Intertribal dances for everyone.

Enthusiastic performers come from The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation and of Warm Springs. These young artists bring fresh vitality to Native American arts and culture so essential to preserving Indian identity. The afternoon will conclude with a traditional First Foods Salmon Bake and dinner.

The River Peoples Cultural Exchange is part of the first [Columbia Gorge Arts & Culture Discovery Month](#), organized by the Columbia Gorge Arts & Culture Alliance. Highlights include the Gorge Artists Open Studios Tour, the weekend of May 14-15, 2011; Running Fruit Ladders, a large-scale art installation, and special activities planned by many arts and culture organizations throughout the [Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area](#), which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

“We acknowledge our shared dwelling in this land as indigenous people and more recently arrived settlers,” RPCE member Portia Masterson said, “At times this story tells of mutual cooperation, sometimes competition, and too frequently of confrontation, disrespect, and abuse. Some of these resentments are deep seated so we come together to build friendships and promote goodwill. The tribal River People share a broader, more accurate understanding of their arts, culture, history, and contemporary life challenges.”



This year the River People's Cultural Exchange honors youth featuring their contribution to society, the challenges they face in our complex world, and activities and programs that support them as they grow to be future community leaders of Lyle and the world. Youth will be among the speakers. Young leaders will guide participants in making traditional Native American crafts at several activities centers. At the same time Indian Elders will share the life lessons they would like to pass down to support youth. This passing on of the oral tradition will take place in the intimacy of one of the Indian tipis setup by festival participants.

The Yakama Warriors will open the day with a solemn and colorful presentation of the honor guard. Master of ceremonies, Simon Sampson of the Yakama Nation, will keep everyone engaged in activities during the afternoon. He will call in exhibition dancers and musicians and rally everyone to participate in Intertribal dances. Guest speakers will share past and present events and programs affecting residents of the Mid-Columbia Gorge.



“The more we dance the more we can enjoy the food!” Masterson said. “So bring your folding chair, sun protection, and water and plan on a splendid spring afternoon.”

Visitors will also be able to observe the traditional method of baking cedar-planked salmon around the open pit fire in the park. The ceremonial dinner will also include traditional roots, water, and huckleberries as well as non-traditional bean and corn salad and baked potatoes with the trimmings.

Ceremonial dinners are free to the public in gratitude “for the abundance given by the Creator.” Donations are welcomed to support the generous meal. All during the event food will be available. Vendors sell fry bread and baked pies and cookies. Fresh sandwiches, vegetables and fruit as well as water and soda will also be available.

Native American vendors offer traditional hand-crafted items including beadwork, fruit preserves, jewelry, and various clothing items. Wishram School Culinary Art Class offers delicious pies and cookies as well as soda.

“Why do we celebrate in small town Lyle? For centuries a strong Native American community has flourished on Lyle Point,” Masterson explained. “Their livelihood was based on fishing, hunting, gathering, and trade.”

Before the damming of the Columbia, the Lyle Point peninsula created one of the narrowest places in the Columbia River causing the turbulence essential to premium fishing. Known to the Indians as “the place where the wind blows from the east and from the west,” these were ideal conditions for drying and preserving fish, game, huckleberries, and roots for the winter season and for trade. Lyle Point is also located at the confluence of the Klickitat River where the cascades also support excellent fishing.

After years of private ownership, Lyle Point was purchased by the Yakama Nation. Now Native and non-Native River People are working together to preserve this historic and beautiful site and its sacred burial ground. Thoughtful preservation will foster public and Native access that respects its beauty and honors its past.

EDITORS NOTE: For images related to RPCE and Columbia Gorge Arts & Culture Month please visit <http://columbiagorgeartsandculture.com/media-images>.

For more information visit the RPCE website at www.riverpeoplesculturalexchange.org or contact Simon Sampson at 509-901-1885, ssam1848@aol.com or Portia Masterson 509-281-0631, portia@bicyclingbliss.com.

About the Columbia Gorge Arts and Culture Alliance: Formed in 2010 by Columbia Gorge culture and arts organizations, historians, artists and culture mavens, the CGACA promotes the Columbia Gorge as an arts and culture region and destination: A magnet that will draw local residents and visitors and benefit our economy. The CGACA focuses on the economic benefit of making the Columbia Gorge recognizable as an arts and culture region. Its goals are for culture and arts organizations and individuals to be recognized as being economically vital to the region, and to make them renewable and sustainable. For more information visit www.columbiagorgeartsandculture.com.

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