Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians hands down traditions to their Youth

10:00 PM PDT on Monday, August 10, 2009

By JEFF HORSEMAN

The Press-Enterprise

A summer program run by the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians teaches ancient skills and customs to tribal youth. Besides making kiichas -- houses made from brush -- and arrowheads, those in the Traditional Knowledge Summer Youth Program say they learn to value each other as well as their culture.

“It’s like a special bond they have with each other,” said Art Masiel, the tribe’s youth director. “You don’t see that outside in the general public.”

Started seven years ago by the tribe’s cultural committee, the program geared toward teenagers runs for six hours a day, five days a week for six weeks. Youths must perform 20 to 30 hours of community service before they can participate. This year’s program ended in July.

The program seeks to preserve traditions dating thousands of years before the tribe first had contact with Europeans. Having endured enslavement by missionaries and eviction from their homes by state decree, the tribe today controls more than 5,000 acres through its Reservation and runs the Pechanga Resort & Casino.

An average of 40 or so students take part in the program each year.

2012 isn’t the end of the world, Mayans insist

BY MARK STEVENSON, Associated Press Writer

MEXICO CITY – Apolinario Chile Pixtun is tired of being bombarded with frantic questions about the Mayan calendar supposedly “running out” on Dec. 21, 2012. After all, it’s not the end of the world.

Or is it?

Definitely not, the Mayan Indian elder insists. “I came back from England last year and, man, they had me fed up with this stuff.”

It can only get worse for him. Next month Hollywood’s “2012” opens in cinemas, featuring earthquakes, meteor showers and a tsunami dumping an aircraft carrier on the White House.

At Cornell University, Ann Martin, who runs the “Curious? Ask an Astronomer” Web site, says people are scared.

“It’s too bad that we’re getting e-mails from fourth-graders who are saying that they’re too young to die,” Martin said. “We had a mother of two young children who was afraid she wouldn’t live to see them grow up.”

Chile Pixtun, a Guatemalan, says the doomsday theories spring from Western, not Mayan ideas.

A significant time period for the Mayas does end on the date, and enthusiasts have found a series of astronomical alignments they say coincide in 2012, including one that happens roughly only once every 25,800 years.

But most archaeologists, astronomers and Maya say the only thing likely to hit Earth is a meteor shower of New Age philosophy, pop astronomy, Internet doomsday rumors and TV specials such as one on the History Channel which mixes “predictions” from Nostradamus and the Mayas and asks: “Is 2012 the year the cosmic clock finally winds down to zero days, zero hope?”

It may sound all too much like other doomsday scenarios of recent decades — the 1987 Harmonic Convergence, the Jupiter Effect or “Planet X.” But this one has some grains of archaeological basis.

One of them is Monument Six. Found at an obscure ruin in southern Mexico during highway construction in the 1960s, the Continued on Page 6
To All My Relations:

There are many events that are available to you. I encourage you to take advantage of the many resources and opportunities that are available to you. I look forward to your enhancement of our program.

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Josh Gonzales
NASP, Interim Director

“Nooner” with Tracy Lee Nelson and the Native American Blues Band.

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Tiny Nut, Big Link
Tribe’s Harvest From Piñon Pine, Which Sustained Ancestors, Is Part Of Cultural Awareness.

10:00 PM PDT on Wednesday, August 12, 2009

By DAVID OLSON

The Press-Enterprise

For centuries, the native peoples of what is now the Inland area have been collecting the nuts of the Piñon Pine trees that dot the San Bernardino Mountains.

This weekend, members of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians will follow in the footsteps of their ancestors, traveling through remote parts of San Bernardino National Forest to harvest the nuts that helped sustain generations of native people. The harvest is part of a three-day cultural awareness and preservation camp held each year near Big Bear for tribal members and their families and friends. The participants will tell stories, sing traditional songs and visit sacred sites.

“This whole area is probably the most culturally significant area for the Serrano people,” San Manuel Chairman James Ramos said, as he bounced along in a 4-wheel-drive SUV that was negotiating rough, rock-strewn roads on a recent morning during a search for Piñon nuts.

Nearby Baldwin Lake is where the Serrano believe their Creator was cremated; the tears of those mourning the Creator’s death turned into Pine and Acorn nuts, according to Serrano teachings.

The 800-plus-acre San Manuel reservation near Highland is only a tiny part of the huge swath of mountain and desert that the nomadic Serrano people traversed before the arrival of the Spanish explorers who later forced them from most of their land.

Ramos was looking for trees that camp participants will return to this weekend for harvesting. Among those accompanying him was Daniel McCarthy, the tribal relations Program Manager for San Bernardino National Forest. Each summer, McCarthy scouts out harvestable Piñon-tree cones. He found a promising grove last month and was taking Ramos to it.

Follow the Crops

As they arrived at the site, Ramos pointed to the flat, arid land that sprawled thousands of feet below to the north. Serrano people would gradually make their way up from the high desert each summer to look for Piñones. The Serrano who lived to the south, in the San Bernardino Valley, did the same.

The Serrano followed crops each year, starting with the Yucca and Chia plants in the early spring and picking Piñones from mid-August through mid-September.

In October and November, as they slowly began their trek back to the valley and desert for the winter, they picked Acorns. They ate some of the food they harvested while living in seasonal camps in the mountains, storing the rest to eat during the winter.

About a half-mile from the Piñon grove that McCarthy came across, he showed Ramos some of the nearly 50 stone mortars he found a few weeks before while helping teach an archeological field class. The mortars were used to grind Piñon nuts. There’s no way to tell how old they are, he said. Native peoples have lived in the San Bernardino Mountains for more than 8,000 years.

Piñones, a small, slow-growing pine tree, are scattered throughout the mountains, but only some Bear cones ready for harvest. This year, McCarthy had a harder time than usual finding seeds. Plentiful winter rains generally lead to the best harvests. The drought is probably why fewer seeds were produced this year, he said.

Ramos broke into a wide smile as he grasped a metal fruit picker he will use to snatch cones from the top of the pines. Ramos’ ancestors used dried, curled willow branches to pluck the cones.

Preserving Tradition

Ramos has a passion for preserving native traditions. Before becoming Chairman of the San Manuel tribe in April 2008, he was Coordinator of the Tribal Cultural Awareness program. He chairs the California Native American Heritage Commission. He co-founded the San Manuel cultural camp in 1996.

Ramos sees pine-nut harvesting as key to making sure tribal culture doesn’t die out among the young. “If we don’t have them pick Piñones and show them who they are and their history and how their culture is unique and different, I don’t know if your sovereignty is there,” he said.

As Ramos approached a tree with harvestable cones, he handed the fruit picker to his 10-year-old son, James, Jr. “Get that one, James,” he said, pointing toward a large green cone. The seeds weren’t ready for eating yet, but Ramos will keep the cones in the sun, to hasten ripening. “Get it, my man,” Ramos said, as his son struggled to pull down the cone. “Turn it the other way and work it. Then pull it down.”

A cone fell into the metal basket at the end of the pole. James brought down the pole and plopped the sticky cone into a burlap bag. The scent of pine perfumed the air. “I love coming out here,” Ramos said. “Oh, man, this is culture. This is what it’s all about. Bringing him makes me happy. We’ve lost a lot of Elders. The kids are going to be the ones to carry it through.”

Reach David Olson at 951-368-9462 or dolson@PE.com

Census 2010
CHECK OFF AMERICAN INDIAN ONLY!

It is important that all Native Americans/American Indians be counted as American Indian on the 2010 census.

Being counted, enables the American Indian community to have a voice and recognizes the need for services and programs among Native communities.

Important facts to know when filling out the census.

If you identify as American Indian, checking the box for American Indian is important whether or not you are personally enrolled or your tribe is federally recognized.

Even if you are mixed race, it is important to check only American Indian because if more than one box is checked there is no guarantee that you and your household will be counted as American Indian.

Naming your tribe is also very important whether or not you are enrolled or your tribe is federally recognized or not.

Finally, if you identify as American Indian, Answer NO to the Hispanic Origin question.

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Josh, William, and Ray Birdsing with a group of students during Gathering of the Tribes Summer Program 2009

At the Gathering of the Tribes students were divided into groups and asked to come up with a team name, flag, and song. Here William Madrigal introduces his team.

Brandon and Josh introduce the “Dark Warriorz” at GAT 2009

Manny introduces the “Ballers” with the help of his team.

Josh Gonzales Interim Director of NASP ends the GAT 2009 program with a blessing

Lady Warriors represent for the young women at the GAT 09 and proudly hold their UCR bears.

Josh Gonzales, GAT participants, and the Birdsingers, perform at the summer program.

The summer program team here chose the name “paloweh” which means beautiful in Cahuilla, the native people of the Riverside area.

Gathering of the Tribes Summer Residential Program 2009 Participants
Nola and Nick Alvarado (far right) traveling from San Pasqual and teammates pose before the start of the 4th Annual Spirit of the Tribes 5k run/walk.

Activities for the kids was a new addition to the annual Spirit of the Tribes 5k.

The Annual Spirit of the Tribes 5K has continued to grow since the first year and here another team poses for the camera sporting their 5k tees and metals.

5k runners waste no time getting going.

Runners and walkers finish hard.

Walking Team at the Annual 5k.

William Madrigal and the Tracy Lee Nelson Band start the nooner of with a few bird songs.

GAT participants receive their certificate of participation and a handshake from the residential assistant.

Base player for the Native Blues Band gets down at the Special Nooner.

Tracy Lee Nelson Blues Band performs at a special nooner in November to celebrate Native American Heritage Month.

(left) The guitar player for the Native Blues Band, , starts to really feel the music.
Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians hands down traditions to their Youth

Students are divided into clans based on ancient family groups.

“It’s good to learn this because we can pass it on to the younger generations and keep it going,” she said. Instructors speaking the Luiseño language as much as possible teach students how to make baskets, pots and other items using tribal methods.

Students also visit historic tribal sites, eat traditional foods such as acorn mush and learn how to build kiichas as well as sweat lodges and other structures. Making kiichas is an exercise in expediency, because the willows and other materials lose their flexibility if not used in time.

Former student Richard Vasquez, 23, said he thought about his ancestors, who hauled in kiicha materials by hand. The students had the benefit of pickups when making their kiichas, he said.

The construction takes place along a dry creek bed behind the Journey at Pechanga golf course. Kiichas lined the creek bed long ago.

“I touch this and I get emotional,” said Bridgett Barcello, an instructor who rubbed her hand along a smooth crater in a rock. Generations before, the impression was used to crush acorns or medicine.

“You can touch this ... and know how your ancestors touched it,” Barcello said.

Other Inland tribes have their own programs to pass on their heritage. The San Manuel Band of Mission Indians’ programs center on the harvesting of plants for food, said tribal Chairman James Ramos.

The first program starts on the San Bernardino Valley floor, where the first plants bloom, and subsequent programs travel up the mountains to reflect how the tribe went to higher elevations throughout the year in search of edible plants, Ramos said.

Pechanga students often return each summer to learn more, and some, like Vasquez, even become instructors themselves.

“It’s this beautiful circle that’s happening,” Barcello said.

“Once (the kids) show up, they get hooked,” Masiel said.

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2012 isn’t the end of the world, Mayans insist

the stone tablet almost didn’t survive; the site was largely paved over and parts of the tablet were looted.

It’s unique in that the remaining parts contain the equivalent of the date 2012. The inscription describes something that is supposed to occur in 2012 involving Bolon Yokte, a mysterious Mayan god associated with both war and creation.

However — shades of Indiana Jones — erosion and a crack in the stone make the end of the passage almost illegible.

Archaeologist Guillermo Bernal of Mexico’s National Autonomous University interprets the last eroded glyphs as maybe saying, “He will descend from the sky.”

Spooky, perhaps, but Bernal notes there are other inscriptions at Mayan sites for dates far beyond 2012 — including one that roughly translates into the year 4772.

And anyway, Mayas in the drought-stricken Yucatan peninsula have bigger worries than 2012.

“If I went to some Mayan-speaking communities and asked people what is going to happen in 2012, they wouldn’t have any idea,” said Jose Huchim, a Yucatan Mayan archaeologist. “That the world is going to end? They wouldn’t believe you. We have real concerns these days, like rain.”

The Mayan civilization, which reached its height from 300 A.D. to 900 A.D., had a talent for astronomy.

Its Long Count calendar begins in 3,114 B.C., marking time in roughly 394-year periods known as Baktuns. Thirteen was a significant, sacred number for the Mayas, and the 13th Baktun ends around Dec. 21, 2012.
If it were all mythology, perhaps it could be written off.

But some say the Maya knew another secret: the Earth’s axis wobbles, slightly changing the alignment of the stars every year. Once every 25,800 years, the sun lines up with the center of our Milky Way galaxy on a winter solstice, the sun’s lowest point in the horizon.

That will happen on Dec. 21, 2012, when the sun appears to rise in the same spot where the bright center of galaxy sets.

Another spooky coincidence?

“The question I would ask these guys is, so what?” says Phil Plait, an astronomer who runs the “Bad Astronomy” blog. He says the alignment doesn’t fall precisely in 2012, and distant stars exert no force that could harm Earth.

“They’re really super-duper trying to find anything astronomical they can to fit that date of 2012,” Plait said.

But author John Major Jenkins says his two-decade study of Mayan ruins indicate the Maya were aware of the alignment and attached great importance to it.

“If we want to honor and respect how the Maya think about this, then we would say that the Maya viewed 2012, as all cycle endings, as a time of transformation and renewal,” said Jenkins.

As the Internet gained popularity in the 1990s, so did word of the “fateful” date, and some began worrying about 2012 disasters the Mayas never dreamed of.

Author Lawrence Joseph says a peak in explosive storms on the surface of the sun could knock out North America’s power grid for years, triggering food shortages, water scarcity — a collapse of civilization. Solar peaks occur about every 11 years, but Joseph says there’s evidence the 2012 peak could be “a lulu.”

While pressing governments to install protection for power grids, Joseph counsels readers not to “use 2012 as an excuse to not live in a healthy, responsible fashion. I mean, don’t let the credit cards go up.”

Another History Channel program titled “Decoding the Past: Doomsday 2012: End of Days” says a galactic alignment or magnetic disturbances could somehow trigger a “pole shift.”

“The entire mantle of the earth would shift in a matter of days, perhaps hours, changing the position of the north and south poles, causing worldwide disaster,” a narrator proclaims. “Earthquakes would rock every continent, massive tsunamis would inundate coastal cities. It would be the ultimate planetary catastrophe.”

The idea apparently originates with a 19th century Frenchman, Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, a priest-turned-archaeologist who got it from his study of ancient Mayan and Aztec texts.

Scientists say that, at best, the poles might change location by one degree over a million years, with no sign that it would start in 2012.

While long discredited, Brasseur de Bourbourg proves one thing: Westerners have been trying for more than a century to pin doomsday scenarios on the Maya. And while fascinated by ancient lore, advocates seldom examine more recent experiences with apocalypse predictions.

“No one who’s writing in now seems to remember that the last time we thought the world was going to end, it didn’t,” says Martin, the astronomy webmaster. “There doesn’t seem to be a lot of memory that things were fine the last time around.”

In this photo taken Oct. 3, 2009, Guatemalan Mayan Indian elder Apolinario Chile Pixtun poses for a portrait at the Iximche ceremonial site in Tecpan, Guatemala. Archaeologists, astronomers and modern-day Mayas shrug off the popular frenzy over the date of 2012, predicting it will bring nothing more than a meteor shower of new-age ‘consciousness,’ pseudo-science and alarmist television specials.

(AP Photo/Moises Castillo)