



KLAMATH TRIBES OF OREGON

Klamath-Modoc-Yahooskin

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: May 9, 2023

Contact: Clay Dumont, Chairman Klamath Tribes

cdumont.council@klamathtribes.com

Ken Smith, Public Relations Director

kenneth.smith@klamathtribes.com; 541-783-2219 ext. 147

Klamath Tribal Court Victim Services Hosts National Day of Awareness For Murdered and Missing Indigenous People

*Klamath County interim District Attorney and Department of Justice
representative attend and participate as speakers*

CHILOQUIN, Ore. — Friday, May 5, was National Day of Awareness for Murdered and Missing Indigenous People (MMIP). The Klamath Tribal Court Victims Services hosted an event in Chiloquin beginning with a Smudge Walk, led by Klamath Tribal Member, Henry Rondeau, with a hand drum from the Chiloquin Bridge to the Tribal Fitness Center. Afterwards, presenters spoke, including interim Klamath County District Attorney John Casalino, as well as Cedar-Wilkie Gillette, representing the U.S. Department of Justice, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Coordinator GAP Solutions, Inc. Contractor, and Kristy David, Executive Director of the Climate Advocacy Center. Tribal members also shared remembrance of loved ones.

“Really our goal with these gatherings and events is just to create safe spaces for families and those that have lost loved ones,” said David. “To be able to gather and acknowledge the names of their missing loved ones and, or murdered loved ones, and have a safe place where they can have a part of healing and be able to share their stories and raise awareness within our community of some of the issues that tribal communities face.”

She said the event is to acknowledge both indigenous men and women who have been missing or murdered across the country.

“The MMIP movement actually began as MMIW, which is missing and murdered indigenous women,” David said. “And throughout the nation, different tribal nations were acknowledging and recognizing that there were also large numbers of men that were murdered. So, the phrase changed from MMIW to MMIP to acknowledge all people. And it's really across Indian Country throughout the United States. This is something that people have been doing – walks,

billboards, raising awareness – for the last, probably 6, 7 or 8 years. It's just become more attended events. Especially in our community, it's something that is still fairly new, within the last few years.”

Casalino, who was appointed interim District Attorney Nov. 1, addressed the challenges of his new position, particularly when prosecuting cases of Klamath Tribal Members.

“I'm the new person here,” he said. “I will say, because of many of the cultural differences, it's super challenging to put a case together and have people, you know, take that risk to have trust that the system will actually listen to them and give their matter that concern it deserves.”

Casalino stated that there are a couple of cases his office is involved in with Klamath Tribes families. He said statewide, the Oregon Justice Department is improving how it prosecutes cases of tribal members.

“I think it's improving, but, I think, Kristy said it first, that the first step is actually coming together. And then, I think, I touched on it a little bit, taking that leap and establishing relationships. So, when someone calls me, I give them the common courtesy to give them a call back. It starts as simple as that.”

Gillette addressed a rather new program launched by the Oregon Department of Justice, providing tracking data for MMIP, servicing nine tribes in the state, as well as cases involving missing and murdered federally recognized tribal members. She said the program was established to provide support nationally for MMIP cases.

“In November 2019, the Department of Justice Attorney General announced a national strategy, the MMIP Initiative,” Gillette said, “and created 11 MMIP coordinator positions in 11 states, and that is when I was hired in Oregon for that. And that's how it started, and that we were tasked with generally supporting MMIP cases in our state and communicating on a national level about what we were doing and about how we could work together.

“Another thing that we worked on, and we are working on with Warm Springs [Confederated Tribes], is a pilot project for a tribal committee response plan, so that the tribe has a plan in place, a protocol, of when a missing person goes missing on a reservation, what each department is going to do. And we plan to invite other tribes in Oregon that want to do the same thing.”

The event continued in Klamath Falls later in the afternoon at Tayas Yawks, hosted by Healing Winds. Partners for the event included: Tribal Court Victim Services, Klamath Advocacy, U.S. Department of Justice MMIP, and Klamath Tribes Behavioral Health.