

A Time To Dance

Duck Valley residents celebrate vibrant tribal traditions at Fourth of July Powwow

By Dianna Troyer

Instead of using words to tell a story, Terry Howard speaks through traditional dances at powwows.

“When traditional dancers bend down and look at the ground, they’re telling about following the tracks of deer or buffalo,” says Terry, 16, a member of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes living on the Duck Valley Reservation. “Or the movements tell the story of war and looking for an enemy.”

Terry will be among dozens of dancers at the tribes’ annual Fourth of July Powwow and Rodeo at Owyhee. Besides dancing, other events include Native American hand games, a parade, rodeo, volleyball tournament, community barbecue, garage sale and cook-offs.

Four years ago, Terry began dancing at powwows that tribes throughout the West host to celebrate Native American heritage through playing drums, singing, dancing and socializing.

“I’ve had a passion for powwow dancing since I was 11,” says Terry, who will be a junior this fall at Owyhee Combined School. “It’s an adrenaline rush to keep up with the beat of the drum. I feel as if all my energy is a ball ready to explode. At my first intertribal dance, I danced my feet off and loved it. I like to dance for those who can’t.”

Last year, Terry made a five-minute video, “My Heart Beats to the Drum,” to



Terry Howard, 16, will dance at the Fourth of July Powwow and Rodeo at Owyhee. This summer he plans to wear regalia of a traditional dancer.

Photos by Rafter M Photography

explain the importance of powwows and dancing in his life. It was shown at the 2016 National Cowboy Poetry Gathering at the Western Folklife Center in Elko and uploaded to the professional video platform Vimeo.

At a powwow, drum groups sing and play for dancers. As dancers twirl and sway to the music, they often are judged and earn prize money.

Divisions are based on age and style of dance: fancy, traditional, grass or jingle. To make a jingle dress, metal tobacco lids

are twisted into cone shapes and attached to the dress to make a soft tinkling sound as dancers move.

“Tribes across America have different styles of dancing, and dancers have distinct regalia or outfits,” Terry says.

Feathers, beads, porcupine guard hair, elk teeth and other items are used to make individualized regalia.

“This will be my first summer to dance traditional,” Terry says. “I chose that because it’s among the oldest styles of dancing.”



Above, the Fourth of July Powwow at Owyhee opens with a grand entry. Right, Terry's beaded medallion combines his Native American heritage with his Christian faith.

Previously, Terry did grass dances. "Dancers try to portray the flowing of grass in the wind," he says.

Terry shows the pieces of his regalia. A bustle worn at the waist has golden eagle feathers radiating from it, while the white tail feathers of a bald eagle dangle at the bottom edge of the bustle.

"It was made by a tribal elder," he says.

At the center is a beaded medallion his mother, Della, made depicting a red Shoshone rose and a cross.

"I wanted to tie in my Native American heritage and my Christian faith with those two symbols," Terry says.

Along with his eagle feather bustle, Terry has forearm cuffs beaded with eagles. His cape with gold-colored fringes has an eagle on the back.

"Whenever I go places, I seem to see an eagle," he says.

Terry also wears a maroon shirt, breechcloth and side drops. On his head, he wears a roach made of porcupine guard hair.

"The porcupine hair is traditional, but others are made from horse hair or synthetic fibers," Terry says. "We have two feathers on the roach to represent two warriors going into battle. One is killed,

so his friend wears a feather to remember him."

The tribes' July Fourth powwow tradition started in the late 1930s. Corliss Garcia says families used to stay for a week at a campground near the powwow arena.

"My mother used to have a concession stand and would sell Indian tacos and other food," Corliss says.

Her mother, Elizabeth Marsh, died two years ago at age 85. She helped organize the powwow, a task Corliss now takes on.

"In January, I prepare my budget to send to companies that donate," she says. "I like to make sure everything gets done, so everyone has a good outcome."

Her daughter and grandchildren dance, while Corliss is content to work behind the scenes.

Esther Crutcher also works behind the scenes, making the regalia for her granddaughter, Korey Rae Kelly, who started dancing the jingle dress dance at age 2.

"She's 8 and likes to do the fancy dance and jingle dress dances and compete for princess," Esther says. "It's a good way for her to have self-confidence. I enjoy watching my relatives dance."

Korey was the 2015-2016 Veterans Day



future princess, and travels to powwows throughout the West with Esther.

The powwows are important, Esther says, because "the drum beat is healing to hear and feel. The powwows help us teach the young about our culture."

Although some dancers travel a summer powwow circuit, Terry prefers to stay close to home. Besides the Fourth of July powwow, he dances in one honoring tribal elders and a Veterans Day powwow. He also travels to the Elko Band powwow.

Terry says as an adult, he plans "to travel the powwow trail until I'm old, to carry on our dances and traditions passed from generation to generation." ■