40th Annual Pah–Loots–Puu Powwow Celebrated
by Edmund Frazer Myer

On the weekend of March 26 and 27, the Ku–Ah–Mah Native American student organization hosted the 40th annual Pah–Loots–Puu Powwow.

WSU junior, Rachel “Chedda” Ellenwood, vice-chair of Ku–Ah–Mah and Nez Perce tribal member, explained that ‘ku-ah-mah’ comes from the Nez Perce ‘Nimiipuu’ language and translates to ‘cougar.’ ‘Pah–Loots–Puu,’ Ellenwood explained, also originates from the Nez Perce language and is what the people who occupied this area called themselves. It is also where the name ‘Palouse’ comes from.

Ellenwood stated that it means a lot to her to be part of Ku–Ah–Mah because WSU was built on traditional Nez Perce land and she feels it’s her commitment to her ancestors and her people to be as involved as she can.

Dan Maher, long-time advisor for Ku–Ah–Mah, has been involved with Native American organizations on campus since the 70’s. He said that before Ku–Ah–Mah, there was a group called ‘Speelya,’ (Spokane for Coyote) but in the mid-70’s the Native American students on campus “wanted something that reflected the local population and they decided on Ku–Ah–Mah.”

Maher said being an advisor for Ku–ah–mah is “truly an honor.”

“Anytime that you have the chance to work with a population that is not the majority and therefore that population is undermined, and that population shows integrity, pride, and the ability to move forward, it’s really an honor,” said Maher.

Ku–Ah–Mah is a resource for everybody at WSU to learn about the Native American culture. Their mission is “to create an awareness of all things that are Native, from issues to celebration, and anything cultural,” said Maher.

Ku–Ah–Mah creates awareness by holding events, which have included having recognized Native leaders come speak. In fall 2015 they brought the ‘Indigenous Voices’ hip-hop group to perform as part of the WSU Humanitas Festival. They have also sponsored a hand-drum making workshop and other cultural events.

Their two largest annual events are the Pah–Loots–Puu powwow, and a fall round dance. Maher said he remembers the first Pah–Loots–Puu Powwow he went to was outside on Orton Field. Back in those days school started in September and ended in June, Maher explained, and they had “better weather to work with” and were able to hold the powwow outdoors. Since WSU changed to the semester system and began starting earlier, students were done by the beginning of May, meaning that Ku–Ah–Mah had to change the powwow to an indoor event.

Sequoia Dance, Chair of Ku–Ah–Mah, said she began preparing for the powwow in May of last year. This year the powwow was student-led, “so students can get an understanding of what really goes on behind the scenes of powwows,” said Dance.
A crowning moment at the powwow was when Amandaree Fox, the 2015–16 Miss Pah-Loots-Puu, had her last honoring and passed the crown to Mykel Johnson, freshman at WSU and member of the Nez Perce Tribe.

Johnson, who is studying international business, said that she decided to come to WSU because it is close to home and because all of the people were extremely welcoming. Her plan is to go into business administration with possibly an economics minor and go back and work with her tribe.

In her application essay for Miss Pah-Loots-Puu, Johnson wrote that as the representative she will promote higher education to all students, not just Native students. She wants to help show the younger generation that there are scholarships available and that there is support for those who need it.

She has already begun taking part in cultural events as Miss Pah-Loots-Puu. She spoke at the ceremony for the new Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center to be constructed on the WSU campus.