Ceremony Held for Site of New Cultural Center

by Faith Price

Construction for the Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center on the Pullman Campus is beginning with a projected completion date of Spring 2017. On April 28, Nez Perce Tribal leaders joined WSU leadership and community in a ceremonial recognition of the land and the construction site.

"The Center will be a gathering place to celebrate culture and diversity," said Interim President Bernardo during his welcome address.

The Center will host cultural events by student organizations and campus programs as well as house the Office of Equity and Diversity. Some of the elements found inside include an open gathering space for large events, a commercial kitchen, and four "knowledge rooms" highlighting Native Americans and those WSU multicultural populations that have had a long history and presence at WSU: African Americans, Chicana/o Latina/o, and Asian Americans.

"I look forward to many cultural meals down here," President Bernardo jested.

The Cultural Center was the brainchild of the late President Elson S. Floyd and bears his name. He envisioned it as a physical space to demonstrate WSU’s commitment to diversity and for the WSU community to learn about and celebrate our diverse backgrounds. The number of WSU students from multicultural backgrounds nearly doubled in the eight years Floyd was president.

The center had the support of Coeur d'Alene student Tillie Torpey from the beginning. Torpey was one of the students who brought the concept of the building to the Board of Regents for their approval about a year and a half ago.

"I think it’s just exciting knowing that the multicultural center was presented as an idea and it’s becoming a reality now," said Torpey. "During the time when several students and I presented this idea, we really put our hearts out there for the board to see how much this center would mean to our communities, knowing that we are being honored."

The physical location of the Cultural Center will be just off of Stadium Way and Main Street, "at the front door of campus," said Mark Sindell of GGLO Design, the firm that designed the new building.

Members of the Nez Perce tribe were asked to participate in the ceremony in recognition that WSU is on their ceded territories. The Nez Perce Honor Guard danced in the flags and eagle staff with help from Waahp Qaqun drum group. Nez Perce Tribal Chairman and "proud parent of a student at WSU," Anthony Johnson gave remarks and words of encouragement to the young people striving to get their education. Words and songs of blessing were offered by Reverend Mary Jane Miles, Secretary of the Nez Perce Tribe Executive Committee, and Nakia Williamson, Director of Nez Perce Tribe Cultural Resource Department, offered good words and a traditional ceremony for the site.

Mykel Johnson, the newly crowned 2016-17 Miss Pah-Loots-Puu and a freshman at WSU gave closing remarks that touched many in the audience.

For more information about the Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center, visit culturalcenter.wsu.edu.