Traditional Foods Brought to the Plateau Center!

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

Emma Noyes (Colville), the Native American Outreach Coordinator for the WSU Spokane campus, came down to Pullman to exhibit some traditional foods of the area. Students and community members showed up for the session and quickly packed the classroom.

Noyes started by giving a brief family history of herself and who influenced her to gather the plants that the people of this region once wholly used to live on. Noyes’s grandma, Jeanette Timentwa, added a lot of drive for her personally in addition to many other relatives.

“For a lot of people they might not be able to get extensive information from family members or they don’t have the opportunity because they have passed on,” said Noyes.

She asked students how they had learned about their people’s traditional plants. Noyes explained that besides family, people turn to other ways to learn, some to books, others to the internet and by coming to sessions like the one she was holding to learn from people with that knowledge. Noyes also relied on books written by another relative, Christine Quintasket aka Mourning Dove, to get information on shellfish and its preparation, adding that reading her books aids as “a voice of a different era.”

As for the food samplings given, Noyes shared the importance of them to her people and the others of eastern Washington. She had jars filled with some huckleberries, soapberries, dried salmon, camas, and bitterroot along with a few more samples. In reference to the Colville traditional diet, and for other tribes in the region as well, a diet for them was “roots, berries, meat and fish.” Noyes’s PowerPoint included many other foods that she wasn’t able to bring in such as wild strawberries, deer and elk, and other types of camas.

Throughout her talk, the students mixed a bowl of soapberries to make what is called “Indian Ice Cream.” As the berries are stirred, they become very foamy. Everyone got a taste without any sweetener, and then a few good spoonfuls of sugar were added to sweeten it.

The food class was definitely a big hit with the WSU community. There were about 30 students, staff, and community members in the classroom around the tables and on the sides. Many were excited to try the foods for the first time.

“I think I just enjoyed trying the traditional foods, most of which I haven’t tried before, like the moss pudding, bitterroots, and the berries,” said WSU student, DJ Coger. “The Indian Ice Cream was gross, but was interesting when trying it.”

With these classes, one take-away for Noyes herself is that, “it is really rewarding when I get to see how much knowledge is in the room with me.” She adds on that she values the knowledge of others especially when it is on a food that she may not know much about because, “it doesn’t come from my tradition or just because I haven’t learned about it yet.”