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Paiute dancer carries tradition to Nevada Day Parade

Guy Clifton, RGJ 8:44 a.m. PDT October 21, 2014

(Photo: Handout photo)

Mike Kane remembers vividly lining up for his first Nevada Day Parade in 1964.

"The Cartwrights were there on horseback," he said. "I thought it was pretty neat that these guys that you'd seen on TV — Ben and Little Joe and Adam and Hoss — were right there in front of us."

The fictional Cartwrights of "Bonanza" fame — including Lorne Greene, Michael Landon, Pernell Roberts and Dan Blocker — were the grand marshals of the Nevada Day Parade celebrating Nevada's 100th birthday.

Kane, then 12 years old, was a member of the Paiute Prayer Dancers — a small band of youngsters from the Reno-Sparks and Pyramid Lake Indian Colonies, who danced at powwows and special events throughout Northern Nevada. They also opened for some of the country stars performing at John Ascuaga's Nugget that year.

He remembers the elders from Nevada's Paiute tribes, including chiefs Billy Williams, Harry Winnemucca and Paul Wright, sharing their knowledge with him and his fellow dancers.

Now a half century later, Kane is still dancing — and still paying homage to his Native American traditions. This Nevada Day, he will help the state cap its sesquicentennial celebration by walking the parade route in a traditional sagebrush outfit he crafted himself.

The parade is Nov. 1 and features about 200 entrants ranging from politicians to the Batmobile making their way down Carson Street. A flyover of military planes will mark the start of the parade at 10 a.m.

Kane is a solo entry in the parade and will be in the fifth section, which enters the route from East Adams Avenue. He'll be just behind the La Ka Le Be Pow Wow and just ahead of a group from the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony.

His traditional outfit, he said, is a remnant of a time long before Nevada's statehood in 1864.

"I wanted to bring back the tradition because no one has really ever seen it," he said of the shirt, which contains the deep roots of the sagebrush plant. His wife, Lois, helped him make the shirt. It was her grandparents who taught her traditions of the craft.

Mike Kane grew up at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, attending Orvis Ring Elementary School and Vaughn Middle School before graduating from Wooster High School. Since graduating from the University of Nevada, Reno, he's been a teacher, worked in warehouse distribution, as an alcohol and drug counselor and, more recently, as a bus driver for the Indian colony.

His Paiute heritage has always been an important part of his life, he said, and he became more active in sharing the traditions about six years ago. In addition to dancing as a youngster, he also was taught to sing traditional songs by Billy Williams, one of the chiefs.

"I go to the powwows and will dance, but I sing also a lot of the old songs," he said.

Participating in the Nevada Day Parade, 50 years after the first time he danced in it, is important on multiple levels, he said.

"I want to dance and carry this tradition on both for myself and my nieces and nephews since I don't have any children of my own," he said. "But it's also to respect to the elders who taught you and it's for those who can no longer dance."

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## **In the steps of ancestors**

By Susan Skorupa; 9:13 p.m. PST January 18, 2014

Tradition runs deep for Lois Kane and her dancers, singers and drummers. It's in the songs of their people, the dances, the close family ties and the honoring of ancestors. And it's the continuation of those lifelines that give shape and purpose to the Eagle Wings Pageant Dance Group, an American Indian dance troupe Kane directs, dedicated to the culture of Great Basin tribes. The group's motto is "Dancing in the steps of our ancestors."

That idea is what led Kane, who is now retired from the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony Language Department, to organize the dance group in 2006.

She had seen pictures of the Pyramid Lake Pageant Dancers and heard about them, although she had never seen the group perform. She attended different schools and saw tribes outside the Reno area promote their dances.

“I thought, ‘What about our Great Basin songs and dances?’ ” she said. “We need to keep them alive.”

She contacted Patty Hicks, leader of a group in Schurz that sings and dances to Great Basin tribal songs.

With grant money, Eagle Wings was funded and in summer 2006, dancers began practicing. The word went out around the region, and people from as far away as Fallon and Susanville wanted to take part.

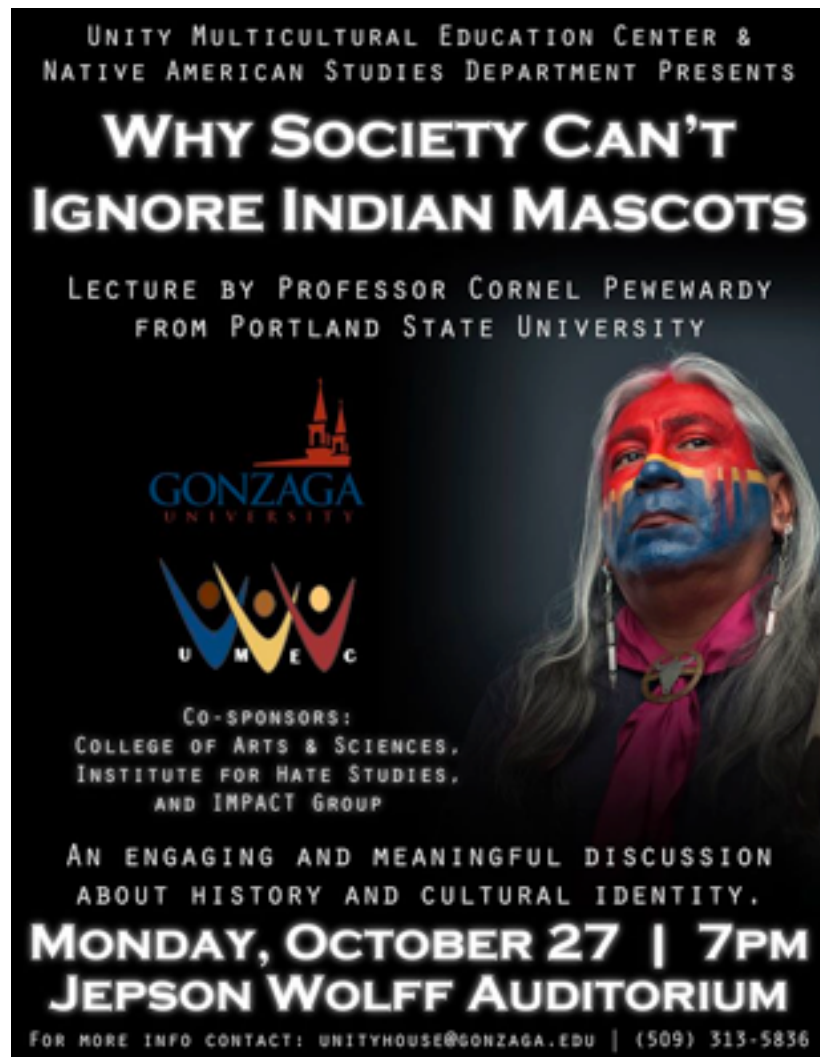
With about 30 dancers, men and women of all ages, Eagle Wings did its first performance at Hungry Valley, a residential part of the Indian Colony, north of Reno.

“Our first dance was in Hungry Valley Amphitheater,” said Janice Gardipe, a singer for the dance troupe. “It was Aug. 22, 2006. I sang at powwows and gatherings; I liked to sing the traditional songs. Lois told me about the group and she said, ‘You should come.’ ”

The idea was to teach and share the culture of the Washoe, Shoshone and Paiute tribes of the Great Basin with anyone who wanted to learn, Kane said.

After the first performance, someone asked the group to perform at a conference or library, then someone else asked for another event, then someone else.

“We’re honored when we’re asked to dance,” Kane said. “It’s an



opportunity to share cultural knowledge, educate people and eliminate the stereotypes that people have.”

The dances are from the Great Basin, all tribes, said Rinna George, 20, an Eagle Wings dancer since the group’s inception.

“In the basket dance, we raise our baskets to honor the creator,” she said. “The antelope and deer dance are praise ... that we have these animals. ... It’s not difficult to learn the songs. Maybe it just runs in our blood.”

For her, the best part of the performances is “letting people know we are still here,” George said. “To see their faces when we dance.”



In this African tribe, when someone does something wrong, they take the person to the center of the village where the tribe surrounds him and for 2 days say all the good he has done. The tribe believes each person is good but sometimes people make mistakes, which are really a cry for help. They unite to reconnect him with his good nature.

What’s most important, she said, is keeping the traditions going for future generations.

“We’re just going to keep it going,” said George, whose children are learning to drum. “From my generation to our kids, to me that’s what’s important.”

Currently, the group consists of about a dozen dancers, including one male dancer, Kane said. There also are drummers — currently, all are women — and four singers. Performances last 20 to 30 minutes.

“Our motto is, ‘dancing in the steps of our ancestors,’ because we believe it is the spirit of the old ones that lead and guide us,” Kane said. “These dances were our way of thanking the creator for the gifts that he provided for our people to live in these desert lands.”

Each dance has a specific purpose, Kane said, such as the deer dance, which is used during hunting season to give thanks.

In the basket dance, the dancers move “with baskets in their hands to a hand-drum beat,” Kane said. “The



baskets are lifted to give thanks, circled, then brought down. To me, it represents that all songs give thanks. ... There's a lot of history behind each."

There is a season and a reason for each dance, she said.

Eagle Wings performs about a dozen songs and dances, Kane said. There are swan, owl, rabbit, eagle and round or circle dances and a snake dance.

"The snake dance is really fun," she said. "There are two dances that are interactive where we have the audience come up — the snake and round dances."

Eagle Wings is a very traditional group, Kane said. The tradition goes back to entire families sharing dance and song when they would gather together about four times a year.

"It took several days to walk to different communities," she said. "They would have games, food and dance."

Dancers grow up and keep the traditions going, Gardipe said.

They'll teach them to future generations who will carry on the traditions.

"We perform when called on and we have a busy schedule," she said.

The performing schedule depends on when the dancers are available, especially those in school or working, Gardipe said.

"The songs and dances we do are considered sacred," Kane said. "I tell the girls, I want them to know how important they are. They are like little ambassadors. They should be proud of that."

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**An Apache girl.** ca. 1912-1930? New Mexico. Source - Burke Library Archives, Columbia University. —

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### **Yosemite Updates**

<http://blog.sfgate.com/stew/2014/10/22/feds-hunt-serial-graffiti-artist-in-yosemite-other-parks/>

[\*\*Feds hunt clueless graffiti 'artist' in Yosemite, other parks\*\*](#)

Federal investigators are trying to track



down what appears to be a serial — and startlingly clueless — graffiti slinger who has left her distinctive, yet tarnishing...  
blog.sfgate.com

### **Yosemite entrance fees to jump 50%**

The rate hikes, a way to offset rising park maintenance costs, would take effect next year. The additional revenue would fund such outlays as remodeled visitor-service buildings, expanded public... sfgate.com

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### **Legislative Watch: Senator Segerblom**

SJR: Calls for an independent scientific and economic audit of the Bureau of Reclamation's current and planned future strategies for Colorado River management.

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— Mountain Lion [#Shoshone](http://t.co/2tvb1MR0dD)

### **Shoshoni Word of the Day: Toyatukku – Mountain Lion**

The Shoshoni word of the day is toyatukku or toyatukkupittseh (depending on dialect) a noun meaning ‘mountain lion’. goo.gl

### **SYLAP University of Utah**

SYLAP -- Shoshone Youth Language Apprenticeship Program at the University of Utah  
youtube.com

### **Shoshoni Language Project**

Shoshoni Word of the Day: Toyatukku

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### **2014 Listening Tour**

The goal of this first-ever school environment listening tour is to hear from students, schools and communities on ways to better meet the unique educational and culturally-related academic needs of Native American students. edtribalconsultations.org

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### **Steve Rypka**

Lake Las Vegas is, along with plenty of other similarly wasteful developments in Southern Nevada, an absurdity that should never have happened. The exceptional photos in this forthcoming book tell all...

### **The Decadence and Environmental Destruction of American Expansionism in Nevada**

Before 2008, Lake Las Vegas, a collection 21 Mediterranean-themed communities built around a man-made lake, and Ascaya, a “mountain-mansion project” created... slate.me

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[Green](#) Planting roots: The University of Nevada, Reno Arboretum Board and the City of Reno have teamed up for a volunteer tree planting event on Oct. 25 as part of the larger process to be recognized as a Tree Campus USA.

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[Lesley Williams](#) shared [Karletta Daane' Chief's status update](#).

I am sharing this. This is well written and discusses the importance of preserving our language without excluding those who aren't fluent. The sad part is that we are so institutionalized we require a "white man test" to measure proficiency in our native language. Do not get offended if you are non-native; that is what it is. That is why we have to measure blood quantum and decide who can be members of a tribe because we are the only race that has to justify who we are. Who are you the government to tell us who we are? Remember this when your tribe denies enrollment to your children and grand children... we are the people and each of our tribal names mean the people. Do not exclude or deny anyone that right because you deny your blood and the heart of your ancestors and tribe!

[Karletta Daane' Chief](#)

Dear Mr. Council Delegate Jonathan Nez,

I am disappointed to learn that you are not supporting Legislation No. 0298-14. As you may know, Shichei, Ben Tallman, is from Navajo Mountain and Shimasani is from Shonto. My family still resides in Shonto. Although, I was raised in Black Mesa and I vote in Kayenta Chapter, I still consider you as representing my family and I.

I saw the video of you stating why the Navajo Nation decided to recess. I want to take a moment to calm your fears. You stated that we need to stand behind our language and there is fear that the legislation will infringe upon the preservation of language. There is no reason to fear this. First, there are already council delegates who don't speak Navajo so your reason is already a moot point. Also, from your impromptu video statement, you did not speak Navajo in a "smooth" manner so as you know, there is no one master of the Navajo language, and we all work to increase our proficiency.

The matter at hand is for THE PEOPLE to determine the proficiency of a leader in the Navajo language. This is already being done right now, from Dwight Witherspoon and Lorenzo Bates being elected by their constituency. I am confident they are not trying to abolish the Navajo language through their leadership but rather working with schools and communities to preserve the language.

But if you want to establish a standard that is quantified, then yes, we can do that for the NEXT election! The 10-day period is passed. If you chose to implement it for the next election, we would have spent 4 years thinking, discussing, and critiquing a test with directed aims just as stated in Navajo law about Ntsahakees, nihata, iina, doo siihasin. Then with that European exam, you can say that a candidate passes at 70%, if that is what you want. Personally, Shimasani, Hazel Tallman (God rest her soul) never critiqued me and graded me in this way! She always said, "Shiyazhi, yeego inti! Nizhonigo yalti. Yeego inti. Awkitao ajilii." Did you know Shimasani? Do you think she would grade your proficiency in the Navajo language? I assure you,

she would not. She would encourage you, tell you how to say it better, and you would learn and increase your effort and ability. It is only because of my elders and my parents, Lilly Etsitty Chief, Hazel Delmar Tallman, Paul Chief, Lillian Chief, Ned Yazzie, and Daniel Benally, that I am who I am! All credit is due to them for my ability to strive to higher learning and continually improve my proficiency in the Navajo language. Furthermore, if you want a standard that is quantified, then why was this standard not equally applied to all candidates regardless of their proficiency from the very beginning? This is unjust! Why is VP candidate Dineh Benally not subjected to the same grievances? Why is an English exam not given to Mr. Whitethorne? This question was raised on proficiency and all I am saying is that it was not equally applied.

There is a lack of leadership, legal inconsistencies, and injustice in the matter of Tsosie/ Whitethorne vs Deschene. First of all, why did Chief Justice Herb Yazzie allow a grievance to be heard AFTER the 10-day filing period had passed? This is the

same judge that somehow allowed Joe Shirley to campaign for a 3rd term! Secondly, a standard was created on the spur of the moment and approved on the fly by an opposing party. Do you think this is biased? I think so! This standard was not critiqued and reviewed by language and cultural experts! I read the standard and it is an illiterate writing of the Navajo language but yet it claims that we should speak perfect Navajo. Who in the Navajo Nation speaks perfect



Navajo? Is it Chief Justice Herb Yazzie? Is it Mr. Whitethorne? Is it you? Who are we to judge as an individual at what specific level, B+, A+, a person speaks Navajo? Is this what my grandmother Hazel Delmar Tallman would say to me? This Whitethorne/Yazzie Standard is full of grammatical errors! It even had an English word "and" in it. Eleanor Shirley could not even read it! She was stumbling through the entire incomplete sentence! I am a Christian and, as you know my grandpas and grandmas go to White Post Church and Black Mesa Bible Church, so we don't speak Navajo according to Hozhoji. So are we not Navajo? Does my grandma Hazel Delmar Tallman not speak Navajo or is she not a true Navajo? How dare anyone say that to my grandma! She worked her entire life through her rug weaving so that we can survive. Because I don't speak Navajo according to Hozhoji, which through Freedom of Religion, I chose not to practice, does this disqualify me to run for any leadership position? This is discrimination! Majority of our young people do not speak Navajo. If their heart is in the right place and they are passionate, they will learn and they will come back to help our people. Just because I was blessed to have parents that spoke to me in the Navajo language, does not give me authority to judge and put someone else down because they faced different challenges. I pray to God that you will not do that! Mr. Chris Deschene has actually created a movement that has never happened thus far even under the past leadership. Many young people are motivated and want to learn the Navajo language. They are inspired by Mr. Deschene's academic scholarship (Page High School



star scholar and athlete, Naval Academy graduate, ASU Masters of Engineering, and ASU Juris Doctorate) and leadership record (veteran in combat, state representative, high school coach). Chris is advocating for preservation of our language through his academic, leadership, and candidacy. He will continue to work towards preserving language and will bring in the young people to re-learn their language. What renaissance like this has happened to this point? What has our leadership done to preserve Navajo language? Are you requiring Navajo language in every school year in every school? Have you implemented anything like the Native Hawaiian Language Schools? I think not. So to say that Mr. Deschene is threatening Navajo language, is a lie. Even you stated that you re-learned it. So you agree, that proficiency is dynamic, changing, and continually improving with use.

The fact is, that this legislation is simply stating that determining the proficiency of the Navajo language rests with the people, which is already going on now! The legislation will put a stop to the biased ruling of Chief Justice Herb Yazzie, and Judge Richie Nez who refused to hear the evidence attesting to Mr. Deschene's proficiency based on the Mr. Deschene's choice not to validate a test given by a biased, opposing party. I ask you to step forward and be a true leader and consider the facts, biased behavior, injustice, and voice of the people.

Joe Shirley should welcome the challenge to go head to head with Mr. Deschene in the election. Both camps support Navajo language so it is not a point of argument. The point is the unequal application of a biased language test after a 10 day period which is the fault of the Navajo Nation government system. The Navajo Election Office already certified Mr. Deschene, printed ballots, and allowed people to vote for Mr. Deschene. At this point, you are treading dangerous ground, by invalidating votes that were casted by a candidate that was already certified.

I am thinking about the future, my 3 year old son Tachiinii and my 1-year old son Ji'Hozho and what the Navajo Nation will be like for them in the future. I do not want that future to full of embarrassment and discrimination. "He that have no sin, cast the first stone." As a parent, I make every effort to speak to them only in Navajo and Ji'Hozho speaks but I pray for my peers who are re-learning and with great heart and compassion desire to give back to their people. Please do not discriminate against us. We are your children. Please listen to us. My grandmother is asking you to bring us home. Please make a way for us to come home.

Thank you for your time and I hope that you will take this into consideration.

Sincerely, Karletta Chief, Ph.D. (2001-07 University of Arizona, Hydrology)  
Kayenta Chapter- Originally from Black Mesa, AZ, Shonto, AZ, and Cedar Ridge, AZ  
Bitterwater, Near-the-water, Manygoats, and Red-running-into-the-water  
100% full blooded Navajo

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**Archival Resources at Utah Government Digital Library at the Utah State Library**

**[Indian Homes for Indian Children](#)**

**[Ute Indian Tribe Head Start Program](#)**

[Ute Indian Tribe Head Start parent handbook, 2009-2010](#)

[Ute Indian Tribe Head Start parent handbook, 2010-2011](#)

[Constitution and by-laws of the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, Utah. Approved January 19, 1937](#)

[Conventional and special symbols legend : San Juan County, Utah \(Navajo Indian Reservation\)](#)

[General soil map : San Juan County, Utah \(Navajo Indian Reservation\)](#)

[Index to map sheets : San Juan County, Utah \(Navajo Indian Reservation\)](#)

[Soil survey of Navajo Indian Reservation, San Juan County, Utah](#)

