USU honors Pow Wow legacy

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By Morgan Pratt

Utah State University hosted the Annual Pow Wow over the weekend in the George Nelson Field House, a tradition which has brought Native Americans from all over the West to campus for 42 years.

While the Pow Wow is known for having elements of dancing and drum playing, the emphasis of the event is centered around the tradition of Native Americans, including USU’s legacy of diversity.

Alicia Olea, an intern with the Native American Student Council and an anthropology major, said a powwow is a gathering of different tribal nations across the U.S.

“It brings diversity to Logan in a town where diversity is hard to find,” she said. “It is a good event for families and for all students to experience. That way they can see other perspectives on campus.”

There were many Native American elders honored at the event, including two former Native American students who had a significant impact on Utah State University. Camelita Delphine Red Elk Thomas and Jenny Begay have been involved with the Pow Wow and USU for countless years.

Begay was awarded with an honorary associates degree from USU by Eric Olsen, associate vice president of student services, on Saturday.

“He honored her because of her commitment to lifelong learning and for her commitment to Utah State University,” said Angela Enno, a program coordinator with multicultural students in the Access and Diversity Center. “She had many credits, enough to qualify for a bachelors degree, but they were kind of all over in many different areas, and they wouldn’t add up to a degree.”

Enno said the university saw fit, based off of her wisdom and her experience as an elder and her commitment to USU and the annual Pow Wow, to honor her and to tell her how much her education has meant to the university.

“Back in 1973 we had approximately 120 Native Americans coming to USU for the very first time,” she said. “We did a lot of recruiting to high school counselors, especially for Native American Week, which the highlight was the Pow Wow. The Pow Wow serves its purpose in recruiting Native American students, especially those who are the first generation.”

Olea said she is a first-generation student herself, who has reaped the benefits of Thomas’ legacy.

“Thomas left a great legacy with the Native American Student Council because he has helped bring diversity to campus and bring natives together,” she said.

Enno said the event is one of the longest running and the second largest on campus.

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