

April 2023

Growing community through camas

Gerardo Ochoa
Linfield University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine

Recommended Citation

Ochoa, Gerardo (2023) "Growing community through camas," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 17: No. 1, Article 11.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol17/iss1/11

This article is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.

Growing community through camas

By Gerardo Ochoa



Connecting learning, life and community.

This is the Linfield mission so many of us have come to love and aspire to as we carry out our work. As Linfield continues to evolve, we must also reflect upon what is meant by “community.” Sometimes in order to move forward, we have to look back. This includes coming to

terms with the fact that Linfield sits on the territory of Indigenous people who lived here long before Oregon, or the university, existed.

In November 2020, Linfield trustees requested that a committee of students, faculty and staff explore a new name for a two-block private street on the McMinnville campus named after a professor (and later president) who served from 1896 to 1905. During his tenure, A.M. Brumbach engaged in archeological actions that today would be considered graverobbing. Recognizing the seriousness and sensitivities of the moment, the committee engaged with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and it was unanimously decided that the street should be known as Lakamas Lane.

In the Chinuk Wawa language, “Lakamas” is the word for camas, a food staple of the Kalapuya, the Indigenous people of the Willamette Valley. Camas is an edible tuber with a blue or purple flower. Remnant patches of camas still grow on the McMinnville campus. Linfield being gifted this name is a meaningful start to a community relationship that needs to bloom. Just like camas needs to be intentionally cared for, so too does Linfield’s relationship with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde as a sovereign nation.

Our past is important, but perhaps more so is our future. The committee grew to envision a collaborative future, and steps have begun to increase Native American representation at Linfield. This year, we will plant the seeds of an annual camas festival. Like the camas bulb, the festival will start small, but with

tending from Linfield and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, it will grow into its full potential.

We also look forward to engaging Native youth in Oregon through sport. Under the leadership of Assistant Professor Natalie Welch, a leading researcher on the benefits of sport in Native communities, Linfield will engage Indigenous communities through various initiatives. Already, Linfield is one of three Oregon universities hosting a Youth Movement Field Day to expose students to a Linfield education, build community among their peers and explore opportunities in sport.

Speaking of education, conversations have also started with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Education Department to reciprocate access to our libraries and explore ways in which future cohorts of Grand Ronde students can attend Linfield at low or no cost by leveraging multiple sources of funding.

Indeed, the future is bright, and I invite all of Linfield to learn more about the lands we now call home. Linfield University is located on what is the traditional territory of the “Yam Hill” band of the Kalapuya. After the 1855 Kalapuya Treaty, the Kalapuya people were forcibly removed and are now members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Our Portland campus is located on the traditional homelands of the Chinookan peoples known as the Clackamas and Cascade tribes. The ancestral village of Nichagwli (nee CHALK lee), meaning stand of pines, was located nearby. The people of this area signed the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855.

Indigenous people have lived here since time immemorial. Tribal members continue to live, work and engage in cultural traditions in their community. Wildcats, wherever you may be, let’s truly connect life, learning and community. Visit your local cultural center, shop at Native-owned businesses, support Native nonprofits, and at the very least, take care of the land that we now call home.

Special thanks and appreciation to the following individuals who contributed to this piece: David Harrelson, cultural resources department manager for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde; Sam Williams, chief information officer and enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes; Natalie Welch, assistant professor and enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee.



A camas patch on Linfield’s property near Cozine Creek has been restored and expanded thanks to a partnership between the Department of Environmental Studies, the City of McMinnville and the Greater Yamhill Watershed Council, among others.