This past month UNEA hosted our 16th Annual Rite of Passage Graduation Ceremony at North Seattle College in the serene landscape of the ‘The Courtyard’. The event theme ‘Standing in Our Power’ was co-developed with student input. Everything from the food, decorations, colors and gifts was carefully planned and organized to ensure that student’s ideas, and wishes were at the forefront of our decision making. The event had a number of last minute changes due to unexpected issues with both our original Keynote speaker and Master of Ceremony, but UNEA was able to secure the humorous, charismatic dynamic MC Randy Vendiola (Swinomish) and speaker Monique Mousseau (Lakota). Our student speakers sparked incredible inspiration with their thoughtful reflections of their high school experiences while also relating their success to remaining steadfast in their goals in life. The 206 Singers kept energy high with their powerful honor, welcome and closing songs. UNEA Interns also offered two songs; Elements Song and Women’s Warrior Song. We were also honored to have the presence of North Seattle College Acting President Jill Lane offer a warm welcome and congratulations to our graduates and families. Special recognitions were presented to the following notable honorees; Dr. Jim Simmons ‘Allyship in Education’ awarded to D’Andre Fisher, Educator of the Year Lauren Nahabe, and Seattle School Board elected official Lisa Rivera Smith. Student recognitions include; Aujanique ‘Student Athlete’ award and Jazell Jenkins ‘Advocate and Leadership’ honors.

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We had the privilege of honoring eight Seniors and fourteen 8th grade risers. Each senior received prints, 8th generation blankets, handcrafted beaded lanyards, cedar headbands, bouquet of flowers and a cedar box with traditional medicine. 8th grade risers received special handmade beaded necklaces, medicine, cedar boxes, bouquet of flowers, cedar headbands and Eighth Gen towels. Our first place Essay Contest winner was awarded to Amelia Andress, the moment was not lost on anyone who witnessed her elation as she received her Apple I-pad and I pen gifts. The recipient of 2023 Roberta M. Wilson Scholarship was Kayla Harstad. Kayla was wrapped in a beautifully vibrant Grand Teton blanket while she spoke eloquently of her passion for education and desire to uphold the RMW legacy. Each special moment was captured by professional photographer Melissa Ponder, and our photo booth was a great backdrop to celebrate the joyous embracing of loved ones by their family and friends. We are super grateful to our funders; Seattle Indian Health Board, North Seattle College, Lora Pennington for the cedar headbands, sisters Chauntai and Kelly Heemsah, All the volunteers, Bryans Filipino catering, 206 Singers, Randy V, Dandre Fisher, Paula M., all UNEA BOD, and UNEA Interns, volunteers and helpers. Big Wopila tanka to each of you for the good medicine you all shared on this very special day with our community.

I am honored and proud to have participated in the Indigenous People’s festival event for the first time at Seattle Center. Kayla Harstad, a fellow intern (Turtle Mountain Band Chippewa) introduced me to Haily Augustine, who works for Seattle Urban Indian Health Institute and was assisting Sophia Seward, designer of Ay Lelum, The Good House of Design. The designs were inspired from a second-generation Coast Salish artform, and located in the Snuneymuxw first nation: Nanaimo, B.C. Together, four UNEA interns had the honor of modeling her line of coast salish inspired clothing.

Each intern took turns with wardrobe fittings with Sophia Seward, followed by visiting her makeup artist and finally, her hairstylist in order to be well prepared for the fashion show. The final moment was for each of us to walk on stage in front of the community and Indigenous observers. In my opinion it was a success and it made me feel proud as a Native, to wear a Native artists’, native fashion inspired design!

It was also exciting and educational to know that fellow Native American artists can inspire and lead the way in the clothing industry with a native flair, highlighting our Coastal Salish art symbols. As a native youth, I really appreciated the fashion designers’ ambitions to challenge traditional fashion trends, showing everyone, that native design and native artists, do have a place in our fashion culture; they are inspiring our native youth to dream of being anything they wish as well as representing and looking good, wearing native culture and heritage.

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This month was the UNEA graduation right of passage ceremony. I was tasked with creating an art piece that represents “standing in our power”. I thought about the many things that I could draw to represent that statement. To me, the thing that stuck in my mind was petroglyphs and what they represent to me. They show how much resilience Natives have and shows we are still here; living and thriving.

I wanted the art piece to not only convey the feeling of power that Natives have, but to also tell and show a story. The story of the girl on the rock she gets to see those magnificent petroglyphs and stand on the same land our ancestors lived on. She knows the rich, the painful, and the beauty in our history and culture that we have lived through.

It’s necessary to share the story of these petroglyphs because it is a part of what I grew up with, and the stories I was told. I grew attached to the one on the bottom left called Sedna, she is a sea goddess that has a hole in her hand to allow enough animal spirits through to allow us to continually have food. Her moral is to not take more than what you need so the future has food. This is something I live by and I hope to spread her story throughout my life. Not only Sedna, but all of these petroglyphs have unique stories, just like the girl on the rock, you, me, and our ancestors. It is a beautiful thing to share these stories and learn through listening and sharing with one another.
WHY ADVOCATE FOR MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN (MMIW)?

BY: LANDYN ZYSKOWSKI
(STILLAGUAMISH TRIBE OF INDIANS)

MMIW stands for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). The term MMIW has been used in North America, particularly in Canada and the United States (North America). MMIW is a term used to describe the crisis inflicted onto our Indigenous peoples and to draw attention to the high rates of violence, disappearances and murders of Native peoples, particularly women and girls.

Sadly, and inexcusably, the MMIW crisis has been ongoing for decades and is a result of systemic issues, such as: colonialism, racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of marginalization, that contribute to such acts of violence inflicted on our Indigenous peoples. The gravest form of culpable infliction in my opinion, comes from our law enforcement and local, state, and federal government agencies, simply not doing enough to investigate, serve justice, protect and safeguard our indigenous peoples.

The MMIW crisis has far reaching devastating impacts on our Indigenous families and communities, which I got to witness first-hand when I attended the Tulalip Tribes May 5th MMIWP Awareness Day Honoring, held at the Tulalip Gathering Hall. I can humbly say, I did not understand or appreciate the depth of the impact, until I sat through this gathering. I witnessed the Tulalip community coming together to show respect and support to those families affected by MMIW with a loved one either still missing or murdered. The honoring this evening was a very powerful, beautiful, and moving (sad) experience for me. I sat attentively on my seat, quietly listening to the families’ personal stories and watched the big screens above, stream smiling pictures of their loved ones – so many people gone – so many beautiful people still missing (and what is hard to wrap your brain around, at least for me, is the simple questions: “where are they” or “how can they just vanish”), they are still out there and need our support!

Being a part of UNEA has helped me grow in so many ways on social issues that impact our native youth, families and communities – especially my awareness on MMIW, and the dire need for everyone – I don’t care what your race is – we need to support each other, and come together, to advocate for the end of violence against our Native Women, Girls and Peoples! As a UNEA Intern I was able to support three events that raised awareness on MMIW during the month of May. On May 3rd I joined my fellow UNEA interns to advocate for the adoption of the MMIWP Proclamation with the Seattle Public School Board. On Friday, May 5th I humbly joined in with the Tulalip Tribes community to show my support in their MMIWP Awareness Day Honoring. On Saturday, May 6th, I proudly joined my fellow UNEA interns in my first pro-activist march, supporting Roxanne White’s third annual march and gathering for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, People and Families. My hands are raised to our UNEA leader, Sarah Sense-Wilson for her continued support and commitment to help me be the best “aware” and “pro-active” young native man that I can be.

That’s all, Landyn.
LOOKING BACK ON MY YEAR WITH UNEA
BY: LANDYN ZYSKOWSKI (STILLAGUAMISH TRIBE OF INDIANS)

My name is Landyn, and I would like to share about my UNEA experiences this past year. I joined UNEA in October 2022 by becoming a student of Clear Sky Academy (CSA), to take the weekly school year long “American Indian Art & Culture” class. I was excited when I found out about CSA and the curriculum and let me tell you why. Our standard public schools do not offer curriculum on traditional native beliefs, culture, ceremonies and history created by and taught from the Native American perspective. For example, this past year we covered native beading, drumming and signing, ribbon shirt and skirt making, native art (capturing NW, SW and Plains styles), traditional and modern indigenous cuisine, traditional plant medicine, and ceremonies. In addition, our classes always opened in the beginning by welcoming each student as we joined together for our: native prayer and blessing, smudging, reading of the land acknowledgement, community announcements, and sharing of food. My favorite unit we explored in CSA was the traditional plant medicine unit. I learned so much about different plants, their healing properties and how I can even use them in my everyday cooking. I really liked the guided field trips to Licton Springs park and the UW Arboretum – to get to see and smell the plants in their natural habitat was amazing. One plant that stuck-out to me was the “usnea” – I always thought I was just looking at some grayish green moss hanging from tree limbs. But I learned that Usnea is also known as “Old Man’s Beard”, it’s a lichen, and it is used for several different healing purposes. All in all, I thought the traditional plant medicine unit was the best and a well-chosen unit to have student’s study.

In late January, I joined the UNEA Youth Leadership Council Internship program. As a UNEA intern, I’ve had the opportunity every month to participate and learn about different community events and social issues that impact Native American youth and families. I even had the opportunity along with other UNEA interns, to address the Seattle Public School’s board meetings, where I spoke on the significance of the matter of MMIW. I personally thought it was pretty cool to be able to stand before and address a school board, and have their full attention, while speaking on the seriousness of MMIW. When I reflect back on all the UNEA events I participated in, I think the one that personally had the most significance to me in representing our native communities, was the privilege I had with taking part in the 3rd Annual MMIW march, led by Roxanne White. I wore my special ribbon shirt made by Nancy Snow, and I marched and drummed alongside other UNEA interns. Marching and drumming through the streets of Seattle was really powerful, I felt like I was calling out to those that were watching and listening from the sidewalks, to “please, take a look and listen to what we have to say”.

This was by far the biggest community event I have ever participated in. The event included hundreds of natives (and even non-natives that support the cause) marching through the streets of Seattle, and for a moment in time, we were making our presence known in a very peaceful and powerful way.

If you are looking to be active in the native community, I highly recommend Clear Sky Academy and UNEA. You will most definitely learn more about the native community, such as, our values, our morals, our traditions, and last but definitely not least, our culture as a whole.
EVENTS & ACTIVITIES:

Billy Mills
Run/Walk for Life
Featuring
Olympic Gold Medalist Billy Mills (Oglala)
MC Auntie Beachress

Adults, Elders, Youth, Kids & Littles
AWARDS/Prizes
Food, Back to School supplies/Resource Tables
Photo Booth

August 27th
1:00–4:00pm
MC Auntie Beachress

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