

Ivan Jackson — Recreating Modoc and Klamath heritage and culture

Tools from the past become future of identity

By **LEE JUILLERAT**
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Most people consider the items Ivan Jackson creates — duck decoys made from tules and colored with natural dyes, hardwood pointed arrows, and hats and baskets that feature simple but complex woven designs — works of art.

For him the better term is identity.

“Everything I’m creating in art form is our identity,” Jackson, 63, said of items that, generations ago, were necessities for his Modoc and Klamath Indian ancestors.

Past and future

During a presentation last week at the Shaw Historical Library, he explained how he hopes the past will be used by future generations of Indians and non-Indians to appreciate Indian heritage and culture. And to understand that items now considered works of art were created for practical purposes.

The various sized, shaped and colored decoys were — depending on their characteristics — set on banks, in willows or on the water by bow and arrow-carrying hunters to lure in ducks and other waterfowl.

“This was definitely survival... These were necessities,” he said.

Jackson believes the items early Klamaths and Modocs made and used as tools also

reflected their cultures and their relationships with the land.

“We didn’t own that land, we took care of it,” he said. “We were not migratory people. Why would we leave? There was so much abundance here.”

Recreating culture

Since successfully battling alcoholism — “I’ve got 22 years of sobriety and I’m proud of it” — Jackson has immersed himself in recreating tribal ways and culture.

“I want to go back and identify our culture before it was influenced by others,” he said.

For several years he was an active participant at Klamath Tribes culture camps. Using lessons learned as a young boy from his grandmother and other elders, he’s worked with the Tribes and as an individual.

“I represent my people through my art by myself,” he said.

He’s pleased that people appreciate and buy the items he laboriously creates. A man’s hat, woven from tules and cattails and shaped with a tall cone, might take four months to craft.

“Education devoured our culture and no one had time to do it,” Jackson said of why traditional crafts and skills were nearly lost. “I’m just trying to create tribal awareness. Our cultural identity is this land.”



H&N photos by Lee Juillerat

Fishing spear: Ivan Jackson shows how a special spear was used to capture and catch fish during a demonstration at the Shaw Historical Library last week.

More than art: Duck decoys are now works of art, but were originally used by early Klamath and Modoc hunters to lure ducks close enough to shoot with bows and arrows.

Art, workshops, programs

Ivan Jackson painstakingly recreates and sells baskets, hats, arrows, bows, decoys and other Klamath and Modoc Indian items.

“It makes me proud because I can share with others and with my tribe,” he says of making a living selling his art and giving workshops and programs.

He can be reached by calling 541-326-8852.

