



Hundreds of Area Students, Teachers Immerse Themselves in California Native American Culture

*The San Manuel Band of Mission Indians celebrated California Native American Day with the
14th annual California Indian Cultural Awareness Conference*

San Bernardino — More than 1,000 San Bernardino and Riverside students and teachers learned about the unique history of California's Native Americans at the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians' 14th annual California Indian Cultural Awareness Conference last week.

This weeklong conference held from September 24 to 30 at Cal State University, San Bernardino was a commemoration of California Native American Day. Falling on the fourth Friday of September, California Native American Day is a day for honoring California's indigenous people, an opportunity for all Californians to learn about Native American culture, and a time for people of all cultures to reflect on and remember their traditions.

"San Manuel is committed to educating the local community on its traditions and culture to gain a greater understanding of what it means to be a California Indian person," said Carla Rodriguez, chairperson of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians. "Our annual conference offers students a glimpse into San Manuel's history, culture, and traditions in hopes that they can go home and learn more about themselves and their families."

Tribal members, elders and academics from throughout the state contributed to the conference to provide an enriching learning experience for all participants and to clarify the myths about California's first people.

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To immerse students in Native Californian culture, groups of students represented different tribes and commenced at the traditional “village”— a central hub where students learned firsthand from tribal members and elders about a variety of Native American traditions including basketry, plants, tools, music, language and dancing.

Children learned from tribal members on the San Manuel Reservation how the tribe still sings and dances Serrano big horn sheep songs as well as Cahuilla bird songs passed down from elders. Tribes in Northern California like the Yurok taught about their traditional dances like the Brush dance.

The lessons imparted in the day’s activities were brought together as the village came to life in interactive theatrical performances with tribal members in full regalia demonstrating how plants, music, crafts and language all define California Indian life.

Since 1999, nearly 45,000 students, teachers and members of the community have attended the California Indian Cultural Awareness Conference at Cal State San Bernardino. This year’s conference was made possible through the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians Education Department; California State University, San Bernardino; the San Bernardino County Schools and the San Bernardino City Unified School District.

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