

LOCAL

'More education is needed': Why this Wampanoag PowWow Experience is coming to Dartmouth

**Kevin G. Andrade**

Standard-Times

Published 3:26 a.m. ET Sept. 13, 2022 | Updated 10:18 a.m. ET Sept. 13, 2022

DARTMOUTH — Residents of the SouthCoast are invited to Round the Bend Farm on Saturday to experience Wampanoag culture at the organization's first-ever Wampanoag PowWow Experience.

"We want as many folks as possible to attend," Annawon Weeden, a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag and the event's coordinator, said. "It's not a ceremony people would be intruding upon."

Organizers said the event was about making sure that people know that indigenous cultures are not confined to history books.

"It's really to connect people and to show and share their energy," Desa VanLaarhoven, executive director of Round the Bend Farm.

Indian logo debate

The organizers said that the debate around the Dartmouth High School Indian mascot played a major role in planning.

"There's been a lot of talk around the Indian logo in Dartmouth especially and [about indigenous mascots] around the U.S.," VanLaarhoven said. "Both sides agree that more education is necessary. Let's be just one tiny point of education."

The Dartmouth Indian logo survived an April referendum following a spirited debate where its defenders — including a small group of Aquinnah Wampanoag, among whom was the logo's original designer — overcame its detractors, many of whom were indigenous.

New venture: First Light Shellfish Farm brings economic sustainability to Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe

Wetu will be centerpiece of event

The centerpiece of the event will be the presentation of the farm's wetu, a traditional Wampanoag dwelling that was built as a community effort.

"I'm super humbled that [Weeden] wanted to build a wetu here," VanLaarhoven said. "That he thought this was special enough to take his time, space, and energy."

According to Weeden, the wetu's circular structure is highly symbolic and is the expression of a Wampanoag worldview at odds with the standard eurocentric perspective.

"The door faces East because that's where everything starts," when the sun rises, he said. "The Earth is round ... It's a cycle."

He added that the greatest significance of the structure was how the community came together to build it.

"It really speaks volumes that the entire area is excited to get this program off the ground," he said. "I've never built a frame as fast as the one we put up here."

"It's the community investment from each individual that I've seen so far that is most impressive."

Curious SouthCoast: A Fairhaven man was first to sail solo around the world. What happened next is a mystery

What to expect and how to attend

Attendees to the event will also be treated to performances by Wampanoag singers and dancers.

"They don't necessarily want to perform," VanLaarhoven said. "They want to dance with you."

There will also be storytellers, food and art vendors, as well as a farmers market.

"It's action packed," she said.

For Weeden though, the most important aspect is that the wider public gets to experience a culture that is living and breathing.

"People read about our culture and may even know about our culture through museums," he said. "It's not a historic thing and it's amazing to me how many people living in New England their whole lives and still have a disconnect with Wampanoag culture.

"We are contemporary."

The experience will run Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., at Round the Bend Farm, 92 Allen Neck Road, Dartmouth, and is free to the public.

Contact Kevin G. Andrade at kandrade@s-t.com and follow him on Twitter:

@KevinGAndrade. Support local journalism and subscribe to the Standard-Times today!