



Dartmouth Week

Powwow celebrates Wampanoag culture at local farm

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Kendall Scott of the Mashpee Wampanoag poses for a photo in her traditional regalia. Photos by: Morgan Beard

Attendees join hands and circle the musicians as Annawon Weeden leads them in a dance.



Visitors wait to tour the wetu — a traditional home made of cedar bark and saplings. Rock Paint, a member of the Mohawk, poses in his regalia.

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A veteran dances around the circle during the victory dance.



Over 2,000 people made their way to Round the Bend Farm on Saturday, Sept. 17 for a “Wampanoag Experience Powwow” meant to celebrate the native culture of the area and commemorate the completion of a wetu — a traditional native home — on the farm’s property.

The powwow, which was led by Mashpee Wampanoag member Annawon Weeden, included traditional singing, dancing, and drumming — as well as tours of the wetu, an all-day native cooking demonstration, archery, native games and storytelling, and much more.

Around the grounds, vendors set up booths to sell native jewelry and handmade products, often using traditional techniques and materials. Nearby at the main house, Round the Bend staff members served up native foods on reusable dishes.

Early in the day, Weeden kicked off the powwow with a grand entry ceremony in which tribal members, dressed in vibrant regalia, danced in a circle around a group of musicians as they sang and pounded a large drum.

A crowd formed around the circle as the ceremony started, some dancing in place to the beat of the drum, others simply watching with interest as the event unfolded.


But the audience was not left out for long.

First, Weeden invited all the veterans in attendance to walk around the circle to be honored in a victory dance. When it was done, the rest of the crowd was encouraged to join in, holding hands as they orbited the musicians in a large circle, first one way, then the other.

Weeden said the point of the Wampanoag Experience was to introduce people to the depth of native culture through hands-on participation, rather than just watching from the sidelines.

“If you’ve ever ridden a bike, it’s all about the experience. We wanted to create a similar encounter with a simple presentation.

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Weeden said he worried that even the singing and dancing, while an integral part of a powwow, would overshadow other aspects of the event, leaving visitors with a shallow understanding of the culture focused more on the spectacle than the meaning behind it.

"Unfortunately, we're still classified as entertainment," he said. "There's so much more to native culture than song and dance."

He said he hoped that instead people would take the time to try out some of the activities themselves to experience first-hand what they were like.

"That's my job, giving people ways to embrace my culture," he said.

Round the Bend Executive Director Desa Van Laarhoven agreed.

"My goal is always to have an event where people have ah-hah moments," she said. "I definitely think it hit there."

Van Laarhoven said the event has been in the making since the spring, when Weeden approached her about building the wetu at the farm.

Though Weeden had already secured partial funding for the project through the Westport Cultural Council, Van Laarhoven said a longtime Round the Bend donor, Ellen McFarland, was responsible for donating the final portion that enabled the project to go ahead.

"Without her, we couldn't have built it this spring and we couldn't have had the powwow," said Van Laarhoven.

She explained that the funding arrived just in time, because building a wetu requires peeling bark off of cedar trees — something that is only possible in the spring, when the trees are still saturated with water.

The bark, once cured, would then be spread over a frame made of bent cedar saplings to form a sturdy, dome-shaped structure that Weeden said could withstand even hurricane winds.

Weeden said that the wetu came together very quickly thanks to the help of many volunteers, which he estimated to have numbered over a hundred on one occasion.

"I've never peeled trees that fast," he said. "A lot of people were involved in making that home."

And if organizers were pleased with the turnout for the wetu building, they were even more excited about the number of people that showed up for the powwow itself.

"All of us were impressed," said Weeden. "The numbers alone doubled what any of us expected."

Weeden and Van Laarhoven thanked the Holy Ghost Society of Horseneck for opening their nearby grounds to parking for the event, as well as L. Knife and Son for sponsoring the powwow.

Both said they would like to do something similar again in the future, though they acknowledged that it had been a significant undertaking that would take careful planning to repeat.

Van Laarhoven noted that Round the Bend staff were still washing dishes and getting things cleaned up on Monday, two days after the event.

"There was a lot going on," said Weeden. "It was definitely overwhelming."

He added that he is "hoping to do it again and hoping to do it even bigger."

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