

COMMUNITY NEWS



Group photo of clay people.



PHOTO BY SEBRA CHOE

Sylvia Wilson

Clay workshop draws various tribes to YAN Cultural Center

BY DON DECKER,
YAN News

Shelten Nunez-Velarde, Jicarilla Apache traditional clay potter from Dulce, New Mexico met with various Indians from the southwest for one week beginning April 22. This event was sponsored by the Heard Museum through their Community Engagement program under the direction of Markus Monerkerits.

Indians from the Salt River Maricopa-Pima, Southern Paiute Nation-Kiabab Band of Paiutes, Navajo, Zuni, Gila River and Yavapai-Apache members participated. The culmination of this one week art event was the firing of the clay pots made by the workshop participants behind the culture center in a roaring ground fire that made the completed pots tempered even for cooking.

Velarde is a well-known clay artist and a world-traveler. After the workshop, he was on his way to New Zealand for the 4th time to meet with traditional Polynesian indigenous Maori for a week begin-

ning May 18. While there Velarde will work on getting a cultural exchange program going with the various groups and his Jicarilla community he says.

After NZ he will travel to Samoa for 3 weeks. On the map, Samoa appears to be close to NZ but it will be a 3 hour flight from NZ to Samoa according to Velarde.

Velarde has been adopted by a Samoan family since he has visited that country before.

Velarde has the traditional tattoos covering part of his upper shoulders to prove this.

"I took my sister to Auckland (NZ) with me. I'm going back to (NZ) to meet a basket-maker with a traditional welcome. Everywhere I go I tend to cling to Polynesian people," he said. "I was adopted by the Samoan family and they treat me just like their own".

Velarde is ambitious and now he talks of going to Tibet and Nepal next year. He is thankful for his pottery knowledge which has helped him garner some prestigious locations to visit while teaching pottery-making. He clar-

fies that his trip to Nepal will not be sponsored by anyone.

Interestingly, Velarde was an exchange student in Brazil for a year on the northeast coast right after high school graduation in 1993 which was sponsored by Rotary International. "My next adventure is to go the Amazon," he adds since he didn't go to Brazil years ago when he was there.

Velarde started out at San Juan College in nearby Farmington, New Mexico but decided to switch over to Parson's Art College in NYC where he attended advertising and graphic design school for 3 years.

In Brazil, he lived with an "upper class family" who had servants. I was just there taking in the sites and learning the language," he said about Brazil.

Velarde's method of pottery is using coils of clay which are coiled upon one another going to the top and then smoothing out the side of the pottery. He learned this technique from Lydia Pesate, an elderly Jicarilla artist

when he was 14.

"I've known that family since I was a child. She use to teach classes on the rez," he said proudly.

During the week on Yavapai-Apache Nation Velarde got the participants making their own designs and no two pottery looked the same.

San Carlos Apache Twila Cassadore, who is a traditional herbalist-Botanist who participated in Velarde's clay workshop took one of Velarde's clay pots and cooked a traditional Pizole meal with corn and squash for the participants that week.

Diane Shearer from the Southern Paiute Nation who was outdoors under a shade sanding the dried pottery which was being readied to be fired said, "I'm joyful. I think it's wonderful and I've learned a lot. This is the first class I've taken". Shearer was there with fellow tribal member Becky Greenwood.

Another participant from the Salt River Maricopa-Pima community, Ron Carlos who is a potter himself, said the technique he learned from Velarde

was different than the style he knows using a paddle to tamp down the clay. However, Carlos seemed to be impressed with the new technique he learned from Velarde as he was awaiting for his pot to be fired in the back lot of the culture center

The clay that he brought to the workshop was mined on the Jicarilla reservation and it contains Mica, a naturally sparkly mineral that gives the clay its special qualities when it is completed fired. The clay was already mixed when Velarde brought it to the Nation's workshop. The clay had to be cleaned and free from sticks and twigs he says. He also says that the clay was used for trade with the Spanish long ago.

The completed clay pieces sparkle.

Velarde is multi-talented and makes clay jewelry designing exquisite clay earrings with a dangly flair. He also makes basketry, bead work and a side workshop he was conducting at the cultural center was making traditional moccasin using deer hide and thick hard

leather soles that were sewn on to the buckskin.

The name 'Velarde' is synonymous with the Heard Outdoor Indian, the Santa Fe Indian Market and showing at the National Indian Gallery in Washington, D.C. four years ago where he demonstrated for one week. This is his second workshop in Arizona with the first one with the Quechan in Yuma last year in March. He is now making plans to visit the San Carlos Apache Reservation in the future.

"Workshops open doors for another (workshop or event). It just keeps going and going," he says about opportunities. He was at an cooking festival at the Heard Museum when Velarde got invited to the Quechan community in Yuma.

"This traveling and demonstrating is my side job," he says with a big smile as he will eventually return to his fulltime job at the Jicarilla Apache Cultural Center in Dulce, New Mexico.



PHOTO BY SEBRA CHOE

San Carlos Apache potters Twila Cassadore and Billy Stevens, Jr. work on their pottery.



PHOTO BY SEBRA CHOE

REba Franco works on traditional Jicarilla Apache moccasins under direction of Shelten Nunez-Velarde.



Shelden Nunez-Velarde of Jicarilla, New Mexico
Photo by D Decker



Jordan Lewis and Sylvia Wilson with their new pots.
Photos by YAN News



Jicarilla clay artist Shelten Nunez-Velarde visits with workshop participants.



PHOTO BY SEBRA CHOE

Artistic hands makes a perfect pot