

Woven through history

Museum shares four generations of Maidu basketry

The excellent and often moving new exhibit at Chico State's Valene L. Smith Museum of Anthropology, *Unbroken Traditions*,

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Review:
Unbroken Traditions: Basketweavers of the Meadows-Baker Families in Northern California shows through May 15.

Valene L. Smith
Anthropology Museum
Chico State
898-5397
csuchico.edu/
anthmuseum

ing, winnowing, fishing, carrying infants (in cradleboards), acorn processing and as water bottles and even women's hats!

More than anything, though, this exhibit is a celebration of the resilience that has enabled the Native people of Northern California to preserve their long-unbroken traditions despite the genocidal attempts to eradicate them and their culture.

As is pointed out in the exhibit's accompanying texts, the Indians of Northern California suffered profound "intergenerational trauma" in the form of "forced relocation, separation, violence and enslave-



ment" resulting in "loss of life, land, resources, culture and languages." The current generation of basket weavers carries with it the "accumulated emotional harm linked to traumatic experiences."

(It's beyond ironic that Chico State is located on land once occupied by—and subsequently taken from—the Mechoopda Maidu tribe.)

The baskets on display were made by Mountain Maidu members of the Meadows-Baker family of Northern California (primarily Lassen and Plumas counties). The exhibit was put together by two master's degree candidates, Coral Willard and Meegan Sims, both from Sacramento. Heather McCafferty, the museum's assistant curator, oversaw the project. Together they did a fine job of putting the baskets in context and portraying them as a valuable tradition that has helped the Meadows-Baker family maintain its culture.

At the heart of the exhibit is a woman who embodied Mountain Maidu traditions. Her name is Lilly Baker, and when she died, in 2006 at the age of 94, she was widely known not only as a masterful basket weaver, but also as a teacher who for many years shared her craft and its history with fourth- and fifth-graders in local schools.

Baker, who learned basket weaving from her mother, is featured in a short film, *Dancing With the Bear: Lilly Baker and the Maidu Legacy*, made by Adam Horowitz and Daniel Voll in 1996. In it she demonstrates

Master basket weaver Lilly Baker.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE KURTZ FAMILY

how baskets are made (each takes a month to weave), discusses the importance of ecological knowledge of the landscape and the materials used in weaving, and laments the nearly total disappearance of the Maidu people, who once numbered 10,000 strong, and their language.

Fortunately, the Mountain Maidu, in conjunction with members of the dominant culture, are memorializing and utilizing the contributions of Native basket weavers. Baker, for example, often was called upon to assist the U.S. Forest Service in identifying plants so the agency could make land management decisions that protected valuable gathering areas.

In 1991, Indians from many California tribes came together to form the California Indian Basketweavers Association, whose mission, according to a statement, is "to preserve, promote and perpetuate California Indian basketweaving traditions while providing a healthy physical, social, spiritual and economic environment for basketweavers."

This revitalization, the statement reads, is "especially vital to our young people who will be responsible for sustaining the cultural practices of California Indians for the next generation."

It's a daunting challenge, but Baker and her fellow weavers have shown the way. □



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6 **ELVIN BISHOP AND CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE**
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11 **MOMIX: VIVA** *Modern Movement*

19 **JAKE SHIMABUKURO**
Ukulele Wizard

20 **NORTH STATE SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS**
Pranksters and Legends

29 **TARANA BURKE**
Founder: #MeToo Movement



NAOMI KLEIN

NOVEMBER

13 **PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND**
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19 **FOUR ITALIAN TENORS** *Viva Italia*

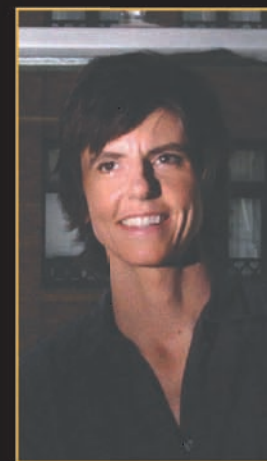
DECEMBER

5-8 **A VERY CHICO NUTCRACKER**
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13 **MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER & SHAWN COLVIN**
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