

MISSION CHRONICLES

Information for Locals

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Mission San Juan Capistrano

Projects Underway to Ensure the Preservation of Mission History

Native American Basket Weavers Maintain Tradition

Native American traditions are alive and well at Mission San Juan Capistrano thanks to a small group of Native Americans who have maintained – and some might say “perfected” – the art of basket weaving.

Teeter Marie Olivares Romero, Ellen Sue Olivares and Kim Olivares Leone lead the teaching of the art of basket weaving every first and third Wednesday at the Mission. It has become an integral part of the Mission’s efforts to preserve the history and traditions of the area.

Teeter has been basket weaving for over 35 years, an idea she came up with during San Juan’s celebration of the Mission’s 200-year anniversary in 1976.

“When we reached out in the 70’s, I was a docent,” Teeter said. “I come from five generations of docents. The 200-year anniversary triggered it in us. I started basket weaving and I liked it, I kept it up because I got so interested in the culture.”

Teeter soon learned that basket weaving involved an intricate process. She learned about the materials that were needed, and it took more than a trip to the store to gather them.

“You have to find a place to gather, so we’d go to the river for materials but it was all concrete in the 70’s,” Teeter said. “We have to go into the wild for materials, like juncus and yucca. Once you have the materials you have to dry ‘em, then size ‘em, then cut ‘em. It takes a long time from beginning to end.”

Ellen Sue says her intent when making the baskets “is to capture the culture of our elders and teach other generations.” Kim says her 10-year-old granddaughter “is learning all of our traditions and it is rewarding to know I’m showing two generations.”

It is indeed a family tradition that Teeter says was meant to be.

“I’ve lived all my life two blocks away from the Mission,” she said. “Sometimes you’re meant to be in one spot. The Mission, for our kids, for our family, has always been our playground.”

