

UC Davis Dedicates Historic Native American Garden

November 16, 2009

California Indian song, bustling tours and quiet, personal moments were all part of the dedication on Nov. 14 of a new outdoor reflective space honoring the Patwin who once lived on the land that would become the University of California, Davis.



[Slideshow: History behind our new P'atwin pathway](#)
(Flash audio slideshow, 3 min., 37 sec.)

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The Native American Contemplative Garden is part of a larger UC Davis project -- believed to be the first at any public university in the nation -- to honor the land's original inhabitants and to educate the campus and its visitors about them.

Among those attending the ceremony were Patwin Elder Bill Wright; Charlie Wright, tribal chair of the Cortina Rancheria; Larry Myers, executive secretary of the California Native American Heritage Commission; Martha Macri, professor in the UC Davis Department of Native American Studies and holder of the Rumsey (Yocha Dehe) Endowed Chair in California Indian Studies; and UC Davis Chancellor Linda Katehi.

'A work of spirit'

Inés Hernández-Avila, a professor of Native American studies and person of Nez Perce and Chicana heritage who collaborated on the garden, calls it "a work of spirit." Under the guidance of Patwin Elder Wright, she said, work on the garden is fostering healing after campus construction projects disturbed native remains.

"The land that UC Davis sits on is ancestrally Patwin land," said Hernández-Avila. "This contemplative garden is a reminder that the connection still exists for the Patwin people who themselves are a living presence in California."

"This recognition is a gift to the campus, to the native community and to everyone," she added. "It's a gift that a lot of people had a part in."

Garden features

The garden sits on the bank of the historic Putah Creek channel and within the UC Davis Arboretum, a living museum with 100 acres of gardens and plant

collections known internationally as scientific and horticultural resources.

The garden features naturally shaped basalt columns representing the Patwin people and their strength and resilience; trees and other plants used by the Patwin people; a curving path representing the flow of the creek and the flow of time; and a spiral seating area designed after the coiled start of a Patwin basket.

The columns include age-old statements of Patwin philosophy, which have survived the mostly unacknowledged history of genocide in California. One of them beckons visitors to "Try to imagine this place with no buildings, no sidewalks, no roads" At the heart of the garden is a column engraved with the names of 51 local Patwin men, women and children who were removed by Spanish soldiers and missionaries from the village of Putoy and taken to missions from 1817 to 1836.

About the Patwin

The Patwin people lived not only in villages along Putah Creek, but in hundreds of villages lining the creeks from Glenn County to San Francisco Bay, according to Tammara Ekness Norton of Far Western Anthropological Research Group. As a people, they were decimated by disease and forced relocation to missions, she wrote in the project plan. Today, only three federally recognized Patwin (Wintun) Indian rancherias remain.

The garden includes about 34 varieties of plants -- many identified by their Patwin names -- that were used by the inhabitants for food, medicine, basketry and much more.

It is the first phase of a project that will include 10 other markers along a campus walking tour to tell the story of the Patwin ancestors and the continuing presence of Patwin people in the region. It is also part of the UC Davis Arboretum GATEways (Gardens, Arts, and the Environment) project, a masterplan in which the arboretum will welcome visitors to the campus and showcase the work of UC Davis scientists and scholars.

'A common purpose'

In the garden's vista, across the creek and through large trees -- including a 400-year-old oak -- is the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts. During the building's construction 10 years ago, an excavation crew uncovered 13 Patwin burials. All remains were subsequently reburied in an undisclosed location.

A committee including representatives from UC Davis, its staff and students, and the Patwin community worked together to develop the plan to honor the Patwin heritage of UC Davis, the Department of Native American studies, and all Native Americans at UC Davis and in the region. The project also serves to mark the Patwin's spiritual connection to the land and their ancestors.

"Where there was once anger and distrust, there is now respect, trust, a common purpose," said committee member Sheri Tatsch, who graduated from UC Davis with a doctoral degree in Native American studies and is a native language consultant.

Patwin Elder Wright has said the new reflective area offers encouragement to American Indian students, telling them that they belong here, that they belong in higher education -- and they can say, "I'm a part of this."

UC Davis enrolled its first students in 1908. The Native American studies department, one of only two in the nation to offer a Ph.D. in Native American studies, is celebrating its 40th anniversary as an academic program and the 10th anniversary of the arrival of its first graduate students.

The arboretum, including the new contemplative garden, is free and open to the public seven days a week.

To view a slideshow about the garden, including historic photos, visit http://ucdavismagazine/issues/fall09/garden_slideshow/.

About UC Davis

For 100 years, UC Davis has engaged in teaching, research and public service that matters to California and transforms the world. Located close to the state capital, UC Davis has 31,000 students, an annual research budget that exceeds \$500 million, a comprehensive health system and 13 specialized research centers. The university offers interdisciplinary graduate study and more than 100 undergraduate majors in four colleges -- Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Biological Sciences, Engineering, and Letters and Science -- and advanced degrees from five professional schools -- Education, Law, Management, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.

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