

2017 Tribal Environmental Health Sciences Forum

By IngriQue Salt / Photos by Alejandro Higuera



“Take care of yourself” -- This was the message that traditional healer, Timothy Terry, conveyed as he opened the 2017 Tribal Environmental Health Sciences Forum. In the busy lives that we enter before the sun rises, it is necessary that we be mindful of our state of mind, body, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing. Without our good health, how can we help all other living organisms, whose existence is vital to continue the life of our Mother Earth?



The biannual Tribal Forum was hosted October 19-20 at Wild Horse Pass, near Chandler, Arizona, on the traditional lands of the Gila River Indian Community. The 2017 Tribal Forum Planning Committee was a truly flawless partnership among various tribal entities. The planning committee was made up of people who brought passion, enthusiasm, professionalism, and great knowledge of environmental issues that exist in their communities. The committee brought the ideas of how to engage the audience to life, which helped to make the forum successful.



Nearly 150 people attended the day and a half-long gathering. Participants heard from interesting and knowledgeable speakers and panelists from around Arizona and the U.S. They engaged in small group discussions about how global climate change, air quality, water quality and agricultural changes impact human health. Participants were also encouraged to develop drafts of action plans that they could take back to discuss with members of their local communities.



With our Mother Earth regularly battling through perilous environmental stressors, it was a strategic goal to heavily integrate youth into the forum to bridge new innovative knowledge and ideas with our traditional and cultural teachings for sustainable practices. To reflect the prominence of supporting our youth, a panel of young professional tribal royalty discussed what it means to be an Indigenous Steward, and the 2017 summer “Protecting Our Lands” youth cohort presented their environmental policy statement. In addition, an evening reception dedicated to youth was held at the Huhugam

Heritage Center to highlight their work, expand their network, build their professional skills, and empower their minds and spirits to continue higher education. Attendees enjoyed hearing about student projects, enjoyed the wonderful meal by Dewski’s Catering and observed the Pascua Yaqui Pacific Island Fitness group and traditional dances by Birds Singing and Dancing by The River, and Keli Akimel Hua Modk Cudkdam.

Everyday many communities, families, educators, healers, leaders, and artists wake up with an innate feeling to live in a beautiful world. To create that beautiful world, a wide spectrum of expertise is needed to give knowledge, insight, and questions necessary to begin healthy positive collaborations to effectively tackle the many issues that exist in our environment. The 2017 Tribal Forum on Environmental Health Sciences was an outstanding illustration of the exciting collaborations that can come about when members of Indigenous communities come together.



Artwork by Dwayne Manuel, O’Odham, representing the O’odham way of life (Himdag) and the relationships between the people of the past and the people of the present. The composition features land, water, and culture – all of which have strong connections and representation for the O’odham.