Happenin’s ‘Round the Hart: BASKET-MAKING OUTREACH AT THE HART

By Margi Bertram, Museum Administrator

A while back, Maggie Christakis, the Hart Museum’s Education and Volunteer Coordinator, met a woman named Heidi Lucero, who belongs to a group called the Chia Café Collective. This group focuses on Southern California indigenous sustenance and resilience, cooking with native plants and encouraging people to try indigenous ingredients and fusion recipes. The Collective has published a book, ***Cooking the Native Way***, with recipes such as rose hip jam, mesquite cookies, cactus salad, chia pudding, and nettle soup, among others***.*** Heidi had been recruited by the NHM interpretive team to present a talk about interpreting indigenous peoples of Southern California. Maggie consulted with Heidi on ways to present a more accurate focus on contemporary indigenous culture, rather than perpetuating the misconception that Native Americans are from “the past.”

Heidi also offers basketry workshops. We reached out to her for help with creating an activity for our Outreach program to better illustrate the art and craft of Native American basket making. Heidi came out to the Hart one afternoon, and brought some round reeds, from which we made small, simple single-wall open weave baskets, with her very patient help. Having participated in this training, I can say it was incredibly satisfying to make even this simple product with my own hands! Can’t tell you how many times I said out loud, “I made a basket!”

For years in our Outreach program, we’d been using a simple activity that demonstrated the basic concept of basic basket making, but we were hoping to find a more realistic, satisfying demo. The baskets we made with Heidi required soaking of the reeds in water, and although we plan to offer this activity at some craft days at the Hart, this was not practical for programs we take to local schools. After doing some research, Maggie found a good substitute in something called fiber rush, which is made out of a paper pulp twisted in a rope-like way to resemble reed strands. It is very flexible and needs no soaking in water. So we will now be able to have our students make an actual usable basket!

In early November we premiered this new activity with three Outreach programs to nearby schools. And the students were *nearly* as excited as I was, and I’m guessing some said to their parents when they got home, “I made a basket!”