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***MEDIA ADVISORY***

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[**Note:** Journalists are welcome to cover this event, which will not be open to the public; please do not publicize the event in advance. Journalists may interview youth with staff approval, although neither photographs nor names of youth may be used.]

**Traditional Aztec coming-of-age ceremony scheduled Saturday at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn**

Nine Hispanic youth who have been learning about the culture of the Aztecs, the source of many Latin American tribes, will participate Saturday in a colorful “coming of age” ceremony at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn.

The ceremony featuring dancers in traditional regalia and led by Willan Cervantes will begin at 1 p.m. in the MacLaren auditorium. As many as 20 dancers from the community are expected to participate.

The activity is a part of fulfilling the Oregon Youth Authority’s mission of protecting the public and reducing crime by holding youthful offenders accountable and providing opportunities for reformation in safe environments.

The ceremony is one in which Aztec young men come of age, learning to conquer their emotions, be good citizens and protect community values, said Steve Llanes, MacLaren’s Native American services coordinator.

He said the nine youth have been learning about the Aztec culture, the meaning of its ceremonies and have made their own regalia incorporating personal symbols based on the day and time they were born.

“It teaches a way of life and relates to changing offender behavior,” Llanes said. “It teaches a healthy way of life by connecting back to the culture.”

He said he would like to offer similar cultural experiences for other cultures as resources permit.

OYA has custody of approximately 900 youthful offenders ages 12-25 in correctional and transitional facilities in Albany, Burns, Florence, Grants Pass, La Grande, Salem, Tillamook, Warrenton and Woodburn, and the agency supervises approximately 1,000 youth on parole and probation.

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