



## **Bear Dance Celebration and Dedication Honor Ute Heritage**

### Community Event Honors Ute Tribal Nations' Annual Spring Celebration

**Steamboat Springs, Colorado-May 7, 2026**-The community is invited to gather at Civic Plaza on Wednesday, May 28 at 5pm to celebrate and recognize the Ute heritage of the Yampa Valley by an official dedication of *The Northern Ute Bear Dancers* sculpture by world-renowned, Southern Ute artist, Oreland Joe Sr. The evening, centered around the traditional Bear Dance, will be followed by a community potluck at The Depot.

"The Northern Ute Bear Dancers sculpture stands as a reminder to the community that the Ute people have stewarded the lands and waters of the Yampa Valley since time immemorial," said Deputy City Manager Kelly Romero-Heaney. "This event is about more than a dedication—it's about coming together to listen, learn, and celebrate a living tradition."

The event honors *The Northern Ute Bear Dancers*, a public art piece created by Southern Ute artist Oreland Joe Sr. Carved from Indiana limestone, the sculpture depicts male and female Ute Tribal members participating in the traditional Bear Dance - an annual spring celebration shared among the three Ute Tribal Nations.

Rooted in tradition and passed down through generations, the Bear Dance marks the transition from winter to spring and symbolizes renewal, strength, and community.

Originating from a Ute story in which a bear teaches the dance and its songs to the people, the ceremony honors the spirit of the bear and reflects a deep cultural connection to the land and seasons. Experiencing the Bear Dance firsthand offers a rare opportunity to respectfully witness a living tradition that continues to hold deep significance.

From time immemorial, the Yampa Valley has been the ancestral homeland of Ute People. Today, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in Colorado, along with the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in Utah, maintain deep cultural and historical ties to this region. The dedication of *The Northern Ute Bear Dancers* reflects a commitment to honoring that heritage and strengthening relationships through collaboration, education, and shared experiences.

"Public art has the power to bring people together in meaningful and lasting ways," said Kim Keith, Executive Director of Steamboat Creates. "Oreland's sculpture is not only a remarkable work of art, but also an opportunity to better understand the cultural traditions and living heritage of the Ute people. We're honored to support storytelling, learning, and connection through the arts."

Following the dedication and Bear Dance, attendees are invited to The Depot for a community potluck to further connect with the artists and Tribal members. The community is encouraged to bring a homemade dish to share and enjoy an evening of connection and reflection in downtown Steamboat Springs. The event is free and open to the public, hosted by Steamboat Creates, Tread of Pioneers Museum, Steamboat Art Museum, and the City of Steamboat Springs.

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#### **Contact**

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