

# Indian language

## Three dialects taught in White Swan as interest in native tongue grows

By CHARLES LAMB  
Herald-Republic correspondent

**WHITE SWAN** — The language pendulum has started to swing a different direction on the Yakima Indian Reservation during the past 13 years.

Instead of a decreasing number of Yakimas speaking the dialects of their ancestors, there is

*'Our language is coming back strong. It is taught here and in Yakima Tribal School. And, good news, Wapato schools are considering it.'*

— Mary Ann Washines

now getting to be more and more Indian language spoken. And not all by Indians.

Mary Ann Washines, 34, new Middle and High School Indian language teacher at White Swan, said she hears Indian and non-Indian high school students conversing in Mummachut in the hallways during class breaks.

Spoken prevalently around White Swan, Mummachut is one of three or four dialects spoken on the reservation; although other dialects are understood.

"Originally," Washines said, "there were 14 dialects — one for each of the confederated tribes and bands that formed the Yakima Nation.

"Dialects of the coastal tribes would not be understood by many Yakimas."

The teacher said Wanna (meaning river) is spoken in the Satus area, and Wanapum (meaning river people), by people around Wapato. "Some words differ among the three communities, but no big communication gap would exist, even without English."

Students that Mary Ann hears talking Indian the hallways learned it from Lena Owens, Wapato, who — before her retirement Jan. 3 — had taught Indian language in White Swan schools since the program began 13 years ago. During the early part, Lena's sister, Amelia, also taught Indian.

Mary Ann received her teaching degree in social studies in 1982 from Central Washington University, majoring in history and Native American studies. She tutored in Wapato schools awhile, then taught full time in Yakima Tribal School until landing her new job in White Swan schools.

Professionally, Mary Ann is following the same tracks of Lena Owens. Also, those of her mother, the late Rosalie Pinkham Bassett, who taught in public grade schools many years and inspired Mary Ann to become a teacher.

Mary Ann and a sister, Elena, inherited their mother's papers and hope to someday write a story.

Other Yakima elders still helping Mary Ann perfect her language teaching skills are Katherine Arquette of White Swan and Cecilia Eli. The latter taught her the Wana dialect.

Washines teaches a class of 21 students from sixth through eighth grades, another class of middle and two high school students and two more high school classes totaling six pupils.

One of the high school girls is Kanami Gutsuj, a foreign exchange student from Japan. Washines says it's interesting to watch Kanami make notes to herself in Japanese characters about Indian words and phrases.

A small number of Indian students bring a good vocabulary of Indian dialect from their homes where it is traditional and expected of them to learn.

The teacher said more young people are going to Sunday Washat Seven Drum Religion services in Wapato, Satus and White Swan longhouses, where the singing and sermons are in Indian dialect.

"It is strengthening their religious feelings," she said.

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### Ida Sweowat Gasca

(Merritt Funeral Home, Wapato)

**WHITE SWAN**— Ida Sweowat Gasca, 27, of White Swan went to be with her daughter Tricia, her father Louis and brothers Paul and Fred on Thursday afternoon August 24, 1989.

Ida was born December 4, 1961 in Toppenish to Louis and Pauline (Mann) Sweowat. She received her education in

White Swan. She lived her entire life on the Yakima Indian Reservation. She enjoyed root digging, bingo, beadwork and babysitting her nieces and nephews. She married Francisco Gasca in 1985. Ida was a member of the Yakima Indian Nation.

Ida is survived by her husband Francisco Gasca of White Swan; her children David Hyde, Jr., Francisco Gasca, Jr., Eladio Gasca and April Gasca all of White Swan; her mother Pauline Sweowat of White Swan; her brothers Wilbur Slockish, Jr. of Wishram, Raymond Sweowat of Brownstown, James Sweowat of Granger, Wilson and Kelly Sweowat of White Swan, Louis Sweowat of Wapato and Jonathan Slockish of Goldendale; her sisters Joyce Kelly, Susan Sweowat and Agnes Wesley all of White Swan; and numerous aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews.

Dressing services will be held Saturday morning at 10 a.m. at the Merritt Funeral Home in Wapato. The body will be moved to the Old Shaker Church in White Swan, Sunday afternoon at 4 p.m. Funeral services will be held at the Old Shaker Church in White Swan on Monday morning August 28th with the body leaving at 10 a.m. for the Saint



MRS. GASCA