

Canoe Journey 2016 ~ Paddle to Nisqually

by Brady Rossnagle, Chris Franks and other DSHS Division of Child Support staff

The 2016 *Paddle to Nisqually* continued an annual inter-tribal celebration and gathering that is rich in meaning and cultural significance. Canoe families from Washington, Alaska, Canada, and other locations travel great distances requiring physical, spiritual, and mental discipline. At each stop, canoe families follow certain protocols asking for

permission to come ashore, and often speaking in their native languages. What usually follows is sharing of meals provided by the host Tribe, gifting, honoring and sharing of traditional prayers, drumming, songs and dances. To mark the importance of this historic event Governor Jay Inslee signed a proclamation declaring July 30 - Aug 6 as "Paddle to Nisqually Week." This year, twenty-two (22) Division of Child Support (DCS) staff from Everett, Tacoma, Olympia, Vancouver, and Headquarters volunteered to work approximately 55 work shifts. They

volunteered at Nooksack/Lummi, Samish, Swinomish, and Port Gamble S'Klallam soft landings (*interim stops on the way to Nisqually*), as well as, the main landing at the Port of Olympia and at the Nisqually Tribe. Participation in tribal cultural events provide staff with not only an opportunity to witness and learn about tribal culture, but to be part of it. Experiencing the significance of the Journey, through tribal members, canoes, protocols, presentations, prayers, songs, drumming, dancing, and food continues to powerfully impact staff.



"I found that while working in the kitchen at Nooksack/Lummi, Samish, and Swinomish, folks would tell us their story" said Lisa Dupre, Everett DCS. "Folks were very interested in teaching us how to make their family recipes and telling us about their culture and traditions. At Nooksack/Lummi, it was awesome to see the canoes land. Half of us worked in the kitchen and the other half were down by the water making cedar wreaths for the canoes for their departure. We made connections with people we would have never met if not helping at the

Canoe Journey. I would highly recommend volunteering at soft landings at local tribes, even if you cannot assist at the final landing and protocol.” “Tribes at all three soft landings were warm, welcoming, and very gracious,” said Tony Ignacio, Everett DCS. “It was like being at a family gathering where you knew everyone, and everyone welcomed you.” Charlene Greer, DCS HQ, shared “I must admit that I did not previously realize how much work goes into volunteering for Canoe Journeys. I met a lot of wonderful people and they were so thankful that I was there to help. This was a very rewarding and important experience.” “Six staff from Olympia DCS volunteered to help at the Nisqually Protocol,” said Andy Ewing, Olympia DCS. “We performed a variety of tasks, served meals, made certain that waters/juices were restocked, and assisting in the Elder’s tent. Personally, my favorite task was the opportunity to distribute cold bottles of water to the audience watching the dances, songs and stories that different tribes shared throughout the day; not only because the crowd was grateful for the cold water, but because I got to watch some of the dances and listen to some of the songs as I distributed water. Many of the tribes shared intriguing stories of their trials, tribulations and triumphs. Even though the Protocol was spread out over many acres, it had a homey feel to it, like a family reunion. Many of the canoes used for the Paddle were on display and the craftsmanship involved was something to behold.”



“I worked at the volunteer table from 7am to 5:30pm, then drove golf carts from 6pm – 10pm,” said Patti Shives, Tacoma DCS. “While at the volunteer table, each of us was given time to ‘wander’ a bit and see what was going on. I was able to go to the protocol tent to see some of my friends from the Quinault Indian Nation take the floor. Watching the dancers and hearing the songs and drums is always one of my favorite parts of the Canoe Journey. During my dinner break, I was able to connect with another friend who was in full regalia, preparing to take the floor with her Quileute brothers and sisters. I love the connection of present with past, and that our Indian Tribes are keeping their cultures alive by continuing the Canoe Journeys and retelling their stories. In the evening driving the carts, I loved the opportunity to talk to elders as I ferried them from the Elder’s Tent to the Protocol Tent, or back to their campsites. I learned that elders will rarely assert themselves to ask for assistance. Most of the time, it was others asking for them. Asking if they would like a ride was usually met with a broad smile and much appreciation. I came home covered in dirt and dust, exhausted, yet feeling fulfilled that I had again provided meaningful support to a very worthy event. I enjoyed the experience, and look forward to volunteering again.”





"I worked three different evenings and was so busy that I didn't have extra time to observe any of the Protocol this year," said Rinae Perron, DCS HQ I.T. "I applaud the Tribes efforts in making this a zero waste and drug free event. After volunteering at three of these events, I observed that Volunteer Coordination is a challenge. I'm very glad I've volunteered for other Paddles, because I feel like I know things I can just step in and do. They ALWAYS need people busing/cleaning tables, straightening chairs, helping with garbage and recycling, etc. It just feels good to participate in an event that has so much significance and meaning. I am in awe by the scale of the event and the generosity of the Tribe hosting it! I will keep volunteering at these." Mark Larson, Tacoma DCS, shared "I worked alongside a UW employee and student who was taking an American Indian related class. Her professor and entire class had camped out so that they could all volunteer. I learned that an old professor of mine, Dr. Thomas Murphy, had brought a group of students from Edmonds Community College." Gail Hanson, Tacoma DCS, shared "Volunteering was enjoyable as always. I met some very nice people. I washed acres of tables before and after meals and helped with recycling. I also enjoyed the book-store that had such a wealth of books of tribal history, so I bought one about tribal women who were influential in history. I also bought some strings of green turquoise beads for a project. Thank you for the opportunity to serve." Georgia Payne, DCS HQ, shared "I worked near the kitchen cleaning up after breakfast, and in the tent where the elders were being served. There was plenty of work to do keeping the tables cleaned, setting up for lunch and dinner, and keeping the chafing dishes filled. Prior to serving lunch, the Olympia DCS team joined us and we had a great time working together in the elder's tent. Lots of people thanked us for volunteering. Everyone was glad to see so many state employees taking the time to come and help. I didn't get to watch any of the Protocol activities, but saw lots of participants passing by in full regalia. I will definitely make a point of watching some of the dancing and singing next time. I was so glad I was there to help, to observe, and experience the pride and excitement that comes with this type of gathering."



Paddle Reflections by Chris Franks, Tacoma DCS

I was originally scheduled to help out in the Health & Wellness Tent on the last official day of the Paddle. I arrived at the event grounds at 7:30am, checked in at the Volunteer Tent, donned my bright yellow t-shirt and made my way to the Wellness Tent - only to find it empty and quiet. After ten minutes or so, a golf cart driven by another volunteer showed up and dropped off some folks who made their way to the dining tent across the grass. I explained to the driver that I was supposed to be working the Wellness Tent, but that there was no sign of any activity there – was there something else I could do to help out? The driver looked around, thought for a second and said “well, I know we’re very short on drivers this morning– do you want to drive a golf cart?” As I had no other options at that moment, I confirmed I had a valid driver’s license and quickly agreed. We promptly drove over to the golf cart corral to meet “Billy” who was in charge there. Billy gave me a brief once-over of starting and driving the cart, using the handheld radio, the location of



granola bars and various snacks and drinks in case I needed refreshment, and then a quick tour of the grounds. I followed Billy in his cart for a “lap” as he explained that I was to basically drive a loop and courier tribal Elders and

folks with mobility challenges wherever they needed to go. And with that I was on my own. I drove around for a few minutes, learning the various campgrounds (they were all named after types of salmon: Coho, Steelhead, Chum, etc.), the general layout, and getting my bearings. A tanker truck sprayed water on the roads to keep the dust down.

By now, folks were waking up and starting to move around. I was hailed by a couple who were on their way to the dining tent for coffee... and “breakfast,” would become THE word for the next couple of hours. “Breakfast!” folks would say smilingly as they loaded into the cart. Everyone was happy at the *Paddle to Nisqually*.

The vendors began to open their tents, trailers and stalls and soon the site was bustling with activity, the smells of grilling foods and frybread wafted across the campgrounds. As breakfast wound down, the huge Protocol Tent across



the small road from the dining and Elders’ tents started to wind up with announcements and prayers, and I shuttled folks, who were by now fed and showered, back to the Protocol Tent. A man with a small dog strolled up to the cart as

other passengers got out. “Can you run me up to my campsite so I can drop my dog off?” he asked. “Protocol is about to begin and I don’t want my dog to disturb anyone.” So, in he hopped and off we went to drop off his dog. Turns out he’s a non-Native private yacht captain who was piloting a support boat for the Lummi Tribe’s canoe. “I was in San Diego delivering a yacht, and on my way back from Australia, when I got a frantic call,” I recall him saying. “Lummi Tribe’s support boat needed a captain, so I caught the first flight out from San Diego to Seattle the next day. I try not to miss these Canoe Journeys – they’re way too cool!”

The rest of my morning went by in a blur. I’d periodically check in with Billy on the radio, or when our carts would pass, and spent the next couple of hours taking folks back and forth between the parking lots, campsites, vendors, dining and Elders’ tents, Protocol tent, or the shuttle van stop for the nearby Nisqually Red Winds Casino...“We’re going to contribute to the Nisqually’s economy!” one person joked.

According to the Protocol Agenda board, the day’s agenda was completely full, with tribes scheduled all day and into the evening. Some tribes brought drums, some were dancers, some were singers. As one of the few golf carts in action, though, I was too “in demand” to spend more than a minute or two in one place, so I didn’t get to hear more than a snippet at any given time. I was delighted though to at least see the various tribes, some in their ceremonial regalia,



staging and lining up outside the Protocol Tent, getting ready to perform for the gathered crowd. I was able to take a lunch break with some of the other volunteers at about 12:45pm, and enjoyed a true slow-roast beef sandwich



and some tasty Minestrone soup. After lunch, several groups of kids started to request rides to “wherever,” just wanting (I think) to cruise around the site and do something different as some of them had already been at the site for 4-5 days. But, it was pointed out to them by several of the event staff that the golf carts were for “ELDERS [and those who need help getting around] ONLY.” Those kids understood and respected what “Elders ONLY” meant, and didn’t try to catch any more rides.

By late afternoon, some folks were packing up their campsites, taking down tents or loading their RVs in preparation for the trip home. Cedar bough-shrouded canoes were being carefully loaded onto trailers and moved away from their prominent display positions near the Protocol tent. Nearby, however, a massive 40-foot long wood-fired grill was erected from cement blocks and the cedar fires lit in preparation for the evening’s dinner. Activity in the kitchens and dining tents swelled too as everyone hustled about their stations.

Meanwhile, on the golf cart front, I was busier than ever. Despite the dinner hour, there had been a shift change and drivers were again in short supply. “Are you the only one driving right now? I think I waited for over 20 minutes and didn’t see another cart!” one lady exclaimed as she sat down in the passenger seat. “You again?!” some others laughed. I knew there were at least two other carts out there, but didn’t know their exact positions.



A couple from BC, Canada flagged me down and asked “Can you take us to the dining tent? They’re cooking the salmon and it smells delicious.” And indeed it did. The rush to the dining tent was on. For the next hour (at least!) the wheels of my cart barely stopped turning as folks rode from their campgrounds and other areas to “dinner.” Some folks picked up

dinners for themselves and others, and loaded back onto my golf cart with plates of smoked salmon, steaming clam chowder, roasted corn, fresh vegetables and – everyone’s favorite -frybread.

The sun was starting to set behind the trees and the shadows grew longer. “I’ve been out here for nearly 12 hours!” I thought, “no wonder I’m tired!”

The Protocol tent was still a flurry of activity, however, and word was that they would be going long past dark, with hosts Nisqually Tribe performing last. I had scheduled myself to work until about 7:00pm but, by the time the dinner rush was over, it was already 7:30. “I’ll make one more loop around the site, to make sure nobody’s stuck somewhere.” I told myself. That one more loop turned into another hour of shuttle duty since every time I’d try to make my way back to the golf cart corral, somebody would flag me down, needing a lift. With my clothes and shoes covered in a fine dust, I finally made it back to the corral and dropped off the cart key and radio, tired but happy.

I walked past the Protocol Tent and watched and listened for a few minutes before tiredness started to set in. I made my way across the campgrounds, through the vendor area, and it was reaffirmed that I was experiencing a modern-day version of traditions that dated back centuries. Tribes traveling sometimes great distances to celebrate their heritage and culture, to connect and reconnect with family and friends, and teach their young the ways of the tribe – just as all societies continue to do.

Surely times have changed (as proven by the on-site Bank of America ATM truck and the solar-powered charging stations for the ubiquitous cell phones), but I could clearly see the connection to the Canoe Journeys of the past. I was - and am - a bit awed to have been able to take part in such a grand event. I whole-heartedly look forward to my next opportunity.

