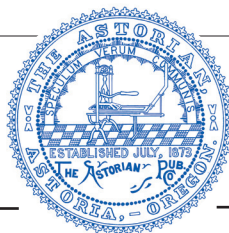


OPINION

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OUR VIEW

A renewed passion for tribal justice

Long path lies ahead, but there are promising signs of broader support

The Chinook Tribe's tenacious efforts to survive as distinctive original residents of this place — and to convince bureaucrats of their legal existence — could form the basis of an intricate legal tome, a multi-part television documentary or a tragic opera.

The drama entered a new chapter last week in the form of a federal court hearing in Tacoma. The legal arguments, as they often are, were dry and based on fairly subtle points. But the setting leading up to the hearing could hardly have been more interesting.

Newspaper, radio and television reporters were on hand to record the scene as Chinook members and dozens of supporters from other Northwest tribes drummed, sang and spoke in the courthouse plaza. Once Tacoma's magnificent train station, it was possible to imagine the location now serving as a departure platform for a more just future for the Columbia River estuary's iconic tribe.

Yes, they are a tribe

It has been soundly argued that the Chinook Indian Nation exists no matter what the Bureau of Indian Affairs asserts to the contrary. Having never surrendered its status as a fully independent nation — a 20th-century treaty having been lost in a maze of red tape that defies easy description — today's Chinook can make an argument that U.S. and international laws provide a path toward reparations of historic proportions.

The Chinook — always good neighbors here at the mouth of the Columbia — have chosen not to pursue this course



Matt Winters/Chinook Observer

Chinook tribal members used drums to greet the arrival of the First Salmon last year, a Fort Columbia State Park event of signature importance to the Pacific-Clatsop-Wahkiakum county tribe and others throughout the Pacific Northwest.

and instead continue pushing for restoration of legal status recognized by the Clinton administration. As with other decisions hurried through in its closing days, by waiting too late Clinton officials left Chinook status vulnerable to attack when George W. Bush took office. The recognition effort was left essentially orphaned. It was only a short time before the Bush administration's Bureau of Indian Affairs yanked the otter pelt from under the feet of the Chinooks, leaving them back in cold, unrecognized limbo.

In the abstract, it might seem straightforward to get a federal agency to admit there still is a recognizable and cohesive group of descendants of the Columbia estuary empire that greeted Lewis and Clark. The national publicity accompanying such a step toward righting a historical wrong would be enormously

positive.

But justice and fairness are anemic toddlers when stacked up against entrenched political and economic interests. Some other tribes don't want finite tribal aid sliced a little smaller to provide benefits to the Chinook. Non-tribal crabbers and others fear additional declines in catches already much diminished by tribal rights on the Olympic Peninsula. These are genuine and rational concerns, but ones that can be addressed without perpetuating decades of injustice against the Chinook, Clatsop and related tribes.

Not only would formal federal status begin healing a longstanding wound in Columbia River race relations, but it would also bring substantial federal resources into local communities in the form of health care and other services. It's important that tribal members will

be helped, as they are our friends and neighbors, but the help they receive will raise living standards and economic prospects for all of us.

It defies belief that this profoundly significant Indian nation has long been consigned to the status of non-being by the manipulations and incompetence of Washington, D.C.'s oblivious corps of professional Indian managers. The glorious past of the Chinook people has brought nothing but ignoble treatment by the American bureaucracy.

Many steps ahead

Last week's hearing is only a way station in terms of the tribe's lengthy legal journey. Whatever the judge decides about allowing the tribe's litigation to move ahead, the other side will appeal. Appellate judges could go either way. If a legal path opens up to really obtain a judicial ruling on the underlying merits of the tribe's case, all that will be subject to additional appeals. In the complex world of tribal law, in which considerable money eventually can be made, patience and deep financial backing are required.

In much of the nation, the end game might be a casino — though there is no present indication that is what motivates Chinook efforts. Many in this area believe there is much more to be gained by the Chinook — and all the rest of us — by pursuing other forms of economic development. This could include everything from sustainable certified lumber, to forms of licensing and branding.

Any result ultimately must put the tribe in charge of its own destiny. Stewards of this region for thousands of years before European Americans came along, it would be interesting to see them restored to a formal position of power on the Lower Columbia.

LIFE AT THE BEACH

How to dine in style after a disaster

If the Big One hits, make friends with the chefs.

Perhaps this wasn't the lesson I was supposed to derive as a judge for the Blue Barrel Challenge on Saturday, but after tasting what could be made from just freeze-dried and foraged food by the right people, the competition showed me a post-tsunami Cannon Beach could be downright delicious.

The cookoff was part of a larger Coastal Community Festival in Cannon Beach, a first-time event which centered around promoting public safety and emergency preparedness. The actual message was to promote the importance of the blue barrel program, which encourages residents to store extra supplies — like food — out of the tsunami inundation zone.

The competition included three chefs: Will Leroux, the head brewmaster at Public Coast Brewing Co., John Sowa, reigning Iron Chef

Goes Coastal champion and owner of Sweet Basil's Café, and Mayor Sam Steidel, who, while not a professional chef, is known for his ability to cook with a cast-iron skillet during Civil War reenactments.

Each chef was given a pantry full of items that you would find in an average blue barrel — such as canned foods, MREs and boil-in-a-bag rice — as well as items that could be foraged for in the area, which in this case was rainbow trout and a variety of edible leaves.

For utensils? A cast-iron skillet, a wooden spoon and a Swiss Army knife.

Oh, and just in case that wasn't difficult enough, it all had to be cooked over an open flame.

This was my first time ever judging a cooking competition — so please take all of my food critiques with a grain of salt. But as I tasted incredibly intricate dishes like quinoa-crust trout and a corn salsa with MRE peanut butter, I couldn't help but think about how well we could fare given enough tools and resources — and how many modern amenities (like regular knives and dishware) we take for granted.

Bob Neroni, owner of EVOO Cannon Beach Cooking School, organized the competition to try and drive home this point in a light-hearted way.

"The seriousness of (a tsunami) scares us. When you can bring a little levity to a serious



Photos by Brenna Visser/The Daily Astorian

Cannon Beach Mayor Sam Steidel talks about components of his dish.



Josh Archibald, executive chef for the Wayfarer Restaurant & Lounge, carries in a secret ingredient.

subject, it's easier to digest," Neroni said.

A slow boil

In 2012, Cannon Beach became the first city in the county to institute the blue barrel program. They were promoted as a way to store and protect valuables out of the tsunami inundation zone. The program came out of

some safety forums held after the 2011 Japan tsunami, when a passion for emergency preparedness was reignited. The barrels went in tandem with the town's effort to establish general cache sites filled with critical medical and survival supplies.

While Saturday's competition focused on food storage, it also suggested people store



Will Leroux, brewmaster at Public Coast Brewing Co., plates a filet of trout for the dish he created.

items like extra clothing, copies of important documents, personal medicines and more.

There are about 60 different barrels stored across three cache sites — a solid number, but one that has stayed relatively stagnant since the program's inception. Mayor Sam Steidel saw the competition as a way of bringing the program back into the public eye.

"I looked at it as a good way to get the message out and have some fun at the same time," Steidel said.

While Cannon Beach is far from the only community that has done work to relocate supplies and services out of the inundation zones, blue barrel programs are something specific to the Pacific Northwest.

"A go-bag is just a backup — what you would need if were truly left on your own. The barrel, on the other hand, should have blankets in there, personal mementos, so if your house is in the Pacific Ocean you still have those things," Emergency Management Consultant Stacy Burr said. "It's especially important here, with no-notice events like Cascadia."

At the end of the day, the dishes made by Leroux and Sowa ended up tying for first place, with each getting a portion of the \$350 raised during the event sent to the charities of their choice as awards.

Maybe not everyone can cook like professional chefs in a post-disaster world. But if this competition taught me anything, putting in a little more thought into emergency food storage can go a long way.

Brenna Visser is a reporter for the Cannon Beach Gazette and The Daily Astorian.