

CLOSE TO HOME

# Descendants of Chinook gather for salmon ceremony

By **DAVID CAMPICHE**  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

It's a game of tides, this river of ours — its ebb and flow and the nocturnal whimsies of moon and deep weeping currents. And storm. Or perhaps a bluebird day, when the skies are fine and deep and translucent.

Everything happens here if you simply wait a while. If you follow the Tao of big water.

A new culture descended here about 200 years ago: those Finns, Swedes and Norwegians, some Irish, some English and, lest we forget, the Chinese, though they got stuck with most of the dirty work.

We were a country of immigrants. They came in great numbers, from every ethnicity, and they came for profit, for opportunity, for gain. There was plenty to pass around. These newcomers simply had to take it from the people who had lived here from time beyond memory.

Quickly enough, the Bostons logged out the magnificent virgin forests and fished for the tens of millions of shim-



DAVID CAMPICHE PHOTOS

**LEFT:** Scott Seilor, a Chinook elder **RIGHT:** Chinook regalia **BELOW:** A canoe bearing a Tye (Chinook) salmon drifts toward Fort Columbia State Park.

mering silver salmon that rushed up the great Columbia River in such numbers that the Corps of Discovery, in 1805, stared in disbelief.

And the Native peoples, the Chinook

and their brethren, also stared and wondered as their way of life was shattered like split firewood. They fell into oblivion, or the next thing to it. These white men, these pioneers from far away,

displaced thousands of years of relative comfort, a lifestyle and philosophy older than the Buddha or Jesus Christ. The Chinook evaporated in such massive numbers that, by the last part of the 19th century, the pride of the few remaining souls deteriorated like the morning fog that clings to the riverbanks and pushes westerly into the great gray ocean, then burns away.

## Sharing the Tye

On a recent Friday at high noon, descendants of that great nation gathered below Fort Columbia State Park and threw a celebration for their talisman: the Tye or Chinook salmon. Tony Johnson, chairman of these proud First Peoples, proclaimed the gathering as a way to honor the powerful fish that fueled their economy for 10,000 years. It was a remembrance. It was a how-do-you-do to summer and those many-faceted blessings.

Think about it: 10,000 years! Stitching together a culture. Defending a culture. Honoring ancestors and

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