

Published photo of skull criticized

The skull of a Native American, possibly dating to the 1600s, were found last month between the ceiling and an upstairs floor of a Portland home. The skull is to be turned over to an Oregon tribe in order to be properly laid to rest.

The owner of the home found the skull while doing some renovation work. Investigators believe the skull was placed in the home decades ago, for some unknown reason.

Louie Pitt, director of Government

Affairs of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, said he is not interested in the mystery of how the skull came to be in the house, except for purposes of determining the possible tribal affiliation of the deceased person.

The important point, said Pitt, is that the skull receive quick and appropriate interment.

He also said the Oregonian newspaper was at fault for publishing a photograph of the skull. The act was not

only disrespectful, but also violated traditional and written laws. The Indian Graves and Protected Objects law says, "No person shall publicly display or exhibit any Native American Indian human remains..." The front page of the Oregonian showed a marked contrast, said Pitt: One photograph was of the Native American remains, while another was a respectful picture of a coffin of a fallen soldier lost in the Iraq war. "Quite the contrast," said Pitt.

Study: Indians more prone to health problems than other ethnic groups

(AP) - American Indians living in urban areas are far more likely than the general population to die from certain chronic diseases, a new national study indicates.

Compared with other ethnic groups, they are more likely to die from diabetes and alcohol-related causes, the study says.

In Billings, Mont., the study found diabetes-related deaths for Indians are 447 percent higher than all other races combined and alco-

hol-related deaths are 438 percent higher.

The leading causes of death are accidents and cancer.

Compared with others living in Billings, American Indians experienced higher death rates for lung cancer (94 percent greater), chronic liver disease and cirrhosis (258 percent greater) and influenza and pneumonia (172 percent greater), based on data from the years 1990 to 1999.

Kennewick Man ruling favors scientists

PORTLAND (AP) - Anthropologists seeking to study the ancient Kennewick Man skeleton received a favorable ruling recently from the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. The court rejected a request by four Northwest tribes for a rehearing in the lengthy dispute.

Tribal lawyers sought to have the case reheard by the full court after a three-judge panel ruled in February that the tribes had no right to the 9,300-year-old remains under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

A brief order issued last week by

the court denied the request from the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Yakama and Colville tribes, who want to bury the remains without a scientific study.

The collection of 380 bones and bone fragments, which were found in July 1996 on the banks of the Columbia River in Kennewick, Wash., are being stored at the Burke Museum in Seattle.

Alan L. Schneider, a Portland lawyer representing the scientists, said his clients were pleased with the court's decision.

The tribes and the U.S. Justice Department have 90 days to appeal the

case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Rob Roy Smith, a Seattle lawyer for the tribes, told The Oregonian that his clients "are clearly disappointed. This case has dealt a staggering blow to the tribes' ability to protect their cultural properties." Smith added that no decision has been made whether to appeal to the Supreme Court.

The February ruling, written by Judge Ronald M. Gould, upheld a 2002 decision by Magistrate John Jelderks of the U.S. District Court in Portland that the scientists can study the remains.

Mystery skeleton placed in open grave

VENTURA, Calif. (AP) - The skeleton of an American Indian, carefully bundled in a purple cloth, was mysteriously placed into an open grave alongside a casket that had been lowered at Ivy Lawn Memorial Park funeral.

"I guess someone in their own right was trying to do the right thing," said Rob Wood, an environmental specialist for the Native American Heritage Commission. The commission is notified when Indian remains are discovered.

No one is sure who put the bones in the grave.

Cemetery workers placed plywood over the open grave last Saturday after graveside services were held, Ivy Lawn president Terri Taylor Gonzalez said Wednesday. The workers returned 45 minutes later to cover the casket with dirt.

When they pulled away the plywood, they noticed a grocery bag wedged alongside the concrete burial vault protecting the casket. Inside the paper bag was the purple material, carefully folded to hold the skeleton, Gonzalez said.

"It wasn't like they took an old shop towel. It was very nice material," Gonzalez said. "It looked to me that they were trying to be dignified about it."

Gonzalez notified police, who contacted the family of the person in the casket to determine if they had any Chumash or other tribal ancestry. Sgt. Glenn Utter said there was no connection to the family.

The bones, including a jaw with ground-down teeth still in it, were likely parts of one person, county chief medical examiner Ronald O'Halloran said. The worn teeth and aged bones indicated they were old remains likely belonging to an American Indian, he said.

The bones are being stored at the coroner's office until Wood's group determines where they should again be laid to rest. Without identification, O'Halloran said he may ask a member of a local tribe to take responsibility

for the remains.

"When remains are disturbed, the journey for that person is halted," said Regina Washtiqoliqol, a Chumash Indian who has interred discovered remains before. "We want to do something with the remains to make sure they can continue with their journey."

The purple cloth means the skeleton wasn't likely placed in the grave by a Native American, Washtiqoliqol said, adding red cloth is more appropriate.

"I imagine that somebody came across these remains in a way that was less than legal, so they got rid of them the best way they knew how," she said.

About 100 discovered remains are reported to Wood's state agency each year.

"Anytime there is ground-disturbing work, it's a possibility," he said.

Washtiqoliqol said she'd be happy to finish the job someone tried to start.

"You have to give someone credit, because it seems someone had tried to do the right thing, and for that I say, 'Thank you,'" she said. "But still there are important things that need to be done for those remains to ensure the best possible journey."

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Government negligent in fatal highway crash

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) - A judge found the government negligent on two counts of a wrongful-death case involving a drunken U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs worker who killed four people in a head-on crash.

The judge in the case said the BIA should have fired Lloyd Larson long before he drove a BIA pickup truck the wrong way on Interstate 40 and collided head-on with the car carrying Edward and Alice Ramackers of Norfolk, Neb., and fellow Nebraskans Larry and Rita Beller.

Johnson said he needed more time to research damages in the "tragic and senseless deaths" and promised a written ruling in about 30 days.