

Willamette University Repatriates A Meteorite Fragment



"Thank You"—Tribal Elder Carol Logan (right) greets Willamette University (WU) Dean Carol Long, who wears a blanket presented to her (in the next photo) by the Grand Rondes. The ceremony took place at the community center on Monday, April 17.

METEORITE continued from front page

Ronde, an Oregon farmer in the early 1900s found the meteorite on nearby property owned by Oregon Iron and Steel, brought it to his farm where he charged people a quarter to see it. A lawsuit returned the meteorite to Oregon Iron and Steel that then sold it to a New York collector for \$20,600. That collector contributed it to the Museum of Natural History in New York City, where it remains on display today.

Starting in 1998, the Tribe made an effort to have the meteorite returned to the Tribe under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) made law in 1990, but in 2000 settled for an acknowledgement that the Tribe maintains a special relationship with the meteorite and maintains the right to visit it annually in private sessions. The issue was never liti-

gated, so the question of ownership of the meteorite under NAGPRA was never settled.

Today, what was (and remains) sacred and priceless to Indians is also a rare and valuable commodity to collectors, and such is the case with "Tomanowos." Pieces of the meteorite are bought and sold by collectors for incredible amounts of money. A 4.5 ounce piece recently sold to McMinnville resident Del Smith, founder of Evergreen Aviation International and the Evergreen Air Museum, for nearly \$12,000. If the 2.2 pound fragment were similarly valued by weight, its value would exceed \$100,000.

"There was not a thought that we owned it," said Dobkins.

The return ceremony included a smudging down of the fragment by Tribal members Carol Logan and her son, Lenny Logan.

Tribal member Richard (Bubba) Sohappay began a prayer for the frag-

ment and Tribal member Leslie Riggs and others soon joined in.

The repatriation included a report by Willamette University student Nicole Blalock on the hazy history of the fragment. It is presumed, by university sources who remembered the fragment, that it arrived at the university "probably before 1940 and probably after the meteorite went to New York in 1906.

"There's a lot we don't know," said Blalock, "but now we've got a start to the history."

A visiting professor "rooting around in the supply closet," found the fragment in May of 2005, and within weeks of finding it, the university officially determined to return it to Grand Ronde, according to Dobkins.

Leslie Riggs underlined the "spirit of friendship that was exhibited by (Willamette University) taking it on themselves to give (the fragment) back. The relationship between the Tribes and these institutions and other entities is getting better."

"I hope this sets a precedent for other institutions," said Trolan, who noted that the University of Oregon and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) also have pieces of "Tomanowos."

"In the spirit of NAGPRA, I hope these institutions consider returning these things to their home."

On April 11, Evergreen's Smith purchased the 4.5 ounce piece mentioned above at auction for \$11,750 at the suggestion of Oregon Congressman David Wu.

"In this situation," according to WU Communications Director Jillian Schoene, "an opportunity presented itself to bring a piece of Oregon history back to Oregon. It will enhance the educational experience for visitors of Evergreen Aviation



Traditional Honor—Tribal members Leslie Riggs, left, and Lenny Logan, right, place a blanket on the shoulders of WU Dean Carol Long.

Museum."

Whether the piece should have come back to the Tribe or not is "an attorney question," said Schoene. "This was a very specific confined opportunity. I can't give a legal answer."

She did not directly respond about whether the Congressman considered repatriating the piece or whether NAGPRA legislation or "the spirit of NAGPRA" would indicate that pieces of the meteorite should be repatriated to the Tribe.

"The whole purpose for us is to bring it back to the Willamette Valley and show it," said Evergreen Air Museum spokeswoman Nicole Wahlberg, "but in respect to NAGPRA, what we'd like to do is recognize the Tribe during the unveiling of the piece and we'd like to involve them in the ceremonies; and maybe we can also recognize the sacrifices Tribes have made in the different wars, and connect our two entities."

The piece sold at auction to Evergreen's Smith came from the New York City-based Macovich Collection, that its website says is, "The largest and most celebrated collection of aesthetic iron meteorites in the world."

In addition to the small piece that sold at auction recently, Macovich principle Darryl Pitt said that he also has a 28-pound piece that will go on the block in the future.

The auction of the smaller piece will "help set the price" for the larger one, he said.

His interest in selling now comes "as a result of the heat that I've received of my possession of these specimens. It's time for me to let go of these pieces." The "heat" he referred to has come "solely from the Grand Rondes," he said.

He knows of at least 100 other specimens that are on the market from time to time, and he said that often, when a collector sells a fragment, the buyer cuts that fragment up into many more pieces to sell.

While Merrily Sterns, Senior Director of Federal Programs for the New York City Museum of Natural History, said that the museum would

never auction off a piece of the meteorite.

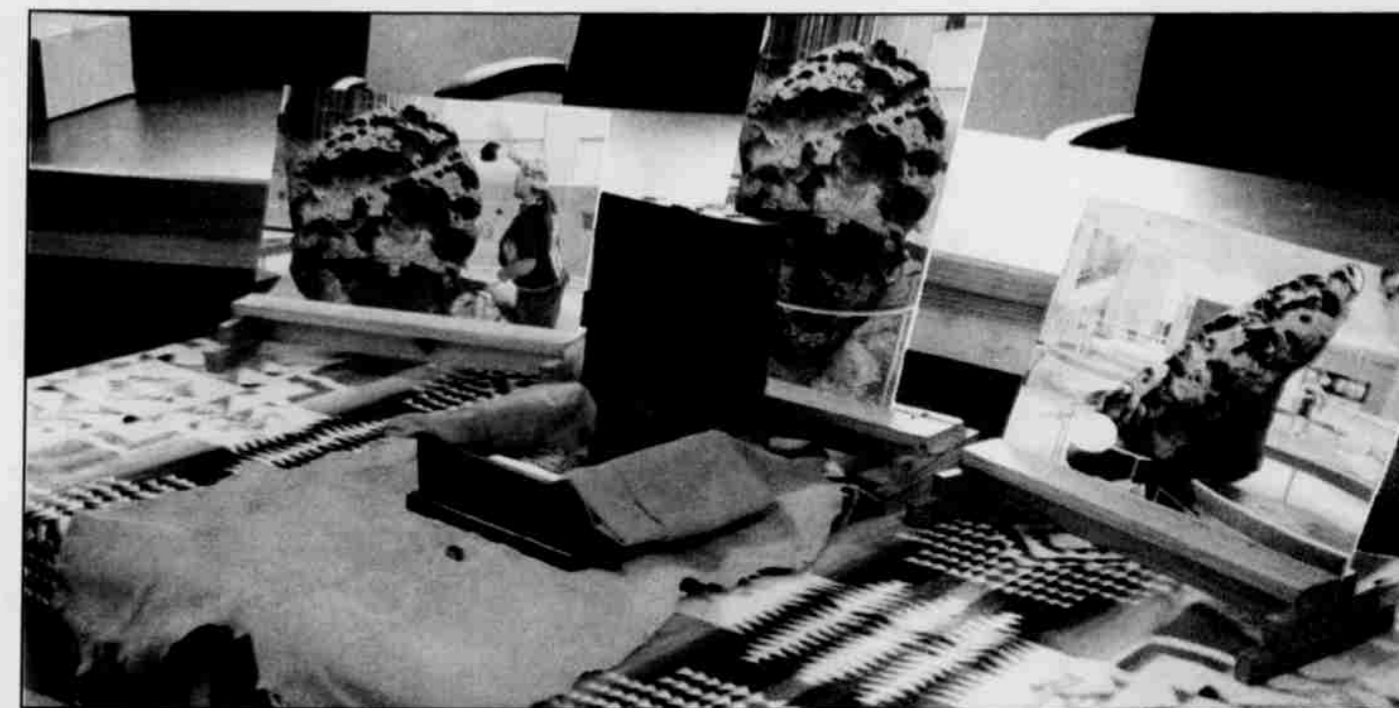
It is, however, common practice for museums to trade pieces, and in fact, according to Pitt, in 1997 or 1998, the piece just sold to Evergreen and the 28-pound piece still to be sold came from the museum in a trade for a number of pieces, including two "very very small" chunks of meteorite from Mars.

Tomanowos, on the other hand, is thought to have come from the breakup of a planet in the asteroid belt. "Scientists believe that it came from a core of a planet that no longer exists, that broke apart during forming of the universe," said Pitt. "Periodically, these fragments will collide and knock others out of orbit, and they land on Mars, Jupiter and Earth."

While Pitt knows well of the Grand Rondes' relationship with the meteorite, and has considered returning it to Grand Ronde, financial and scientific considerations keep him from doing so.

"I would love to," he said. "I wish I had the financial means."

"It's been venerated over time but



Missing Parts—Here in the Tribal Community Center, the Tomanowos fragment was placed on a table with photographs of the entire meteorite now held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

it is also important to science," he said. "Meteorites always have to be subdivided to be studied because the outside is contaminated when they burn through the atmosphere."

Other pieces now in Oregon collections include small "flakes" of the meteorite that individual Oregonians donated to OMSI in 1959 and 1965, according to OMSI Communications Director Elaina Medina.

A 1990 letter writing campaign initiated by third graders in Lake Oswego and supported with a bill in Congress sought return of the entire meteorite to Oregon, and more specifically, to OMSI. Thirty eight thousand children in Oregon and Washington urged the New York museum to return the meteorite to the Oregon museum.

In the end, OMSI had no more luck than the Tribes have in regaining possession of the Sky Person. Today, the OMSI exhibit that also includes meteorite fragments found in Arizona and New Mexico, includes the legend,

"The Clackamas Tribe which is now part of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, retains the right to use the meteorite for religious, historical and cultural purposes."

The University of Oregon's Museum of Natural History could not be reached for comment in time for publication.

Following the ceremony at the Hallie Ford, the group returned to Grand Ronde for a commemorative lunch and an opportunity for Tribal Elders and others to speak about the fragment and the meteorite.

"I want to thank Willamette University for bringing this back," said Tribal member and Tribal Tourism Coordinator Elaine LaBonte. "For me, to touch that meteorite was really significant. It's our heart and soul."

Gifts were exchanged, including blankets. "These are small tokens of a very significant gift," said Cultural Department interim Manager Tony Johnson.

A class of Chinuk-wawa Immer-

sion students sang "Ntsayka-kama-mawkst" for the gathering. The title is translated as, "The More We Get Together."

This is a great moment in the museum's history," said John Olbrantz, the Maribeth Collins Director of the museum.

Also on hand from the university were Ann Nagorski, Associate Dean, Gordy Toyama, Multi-Cultural Affairs Director, Dave Craig, a biology Professor and Rebecca Knight, a Tribal member and junior at Willamette University.

From the Tribal Council, Chairwoman Kennedy was joined by Vice Chairwoman Angie Blackwell, Secretary Chris Mercier and Council members Kathleen Tom and Soderberg. In addition to those mentioned above, the Tribe was represented by Public Relations Director Siobhan Taylor, Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison, Tribal Elder and Elder Committee Chairwoman Louise Coulson and many others. ■

National Library Week In Grand Ronde

■ Elders, youngsters, poets and prizes marked a week for reading and writing.

By Ron Karten

The third annual Open House at the Tribal library capped off National Library Week, April 2-8, but as Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison remembers, it was a dreary day in a rainy week.

"It was good to see those who came out," she said. "It was a day you might want to stay home." But many came to get a signed edition of Standing Tall, the recent biography of Kathryn Harrison by Kristine Olson, former U.S. Attorney for Oregon and longtime friend of the Tribe.

Many came to hear Harrison speak, and all enjoyed the range of events prepared for the April 8 Open House by Tribal member and Grand Ronde Librarian Marion Mercier.

"She did a real good job of entertainment," said Harrison. Some of the Elders watched one

of hundreds of movies available to patrons of the library.

During the week, the library tallied 182 visitors, 164 circulations, 37 donations, 22 computer use sign-ins and four new library cards.

Poetry has been a big part of Tribal Library programs. A poetry contest found winners in three different categories: rhythm (Tribal member Bill Beaver), Haiku (Tribal member and Tribal Council Secretary Chris Mercier), and shape (Connie Brown).

A Native author trivia game was won by Tribal member Jesse (Pee-Wee) Robertson, who answered eight of 10 questions right.

"What I loved about this year's Open House," said Mercier, "is that we did have some Tribal Elders present and they seemed to really enjoy themselves. And they all participated in the different activities we had going on. That was a highlight of the whole library open house this year."

During the event, the visitors took home bookmarks. From drawings, they won prizes, "and that even made it more memorable for all the kids,"

said Mercier. "It gave some meaning to National Library Week for all those kids of different ages." ■



Library Visit—Tribal Elder Dale Langley (l to r) and his wife, Shirley, along with Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison enjoyed some of the activities held in the Tribal Library for National Library Week.



The Tomanowos fragment as presented to the Grand Rondes