

Filmmakers Richard Doyon And Jane Beaumont Hall Feature Grand Ronde Tribal Members And Many Northwest Locations In Their New Film

■ The Tillamook Treasure is an award-winning family film screened recently in Salem.

By Ron Karten

The story of The Tillamook Treasure comes from a Neahkahnie Legend that Northwest Indians have passed down for generations. In the version from California filmmakers Richard Doyon and Jane Beaumont Hall, who are married, the treasure is buried by the Spanish, who kill a Black slave and place the body over the treasure to frighten away Indians.

The Native American response, told by actor Floyd Crow Westerman (Lakota Sioux) is that Indians left the treasure alone for all those years because they did not need the treasure. They had the sky, the mountains, the rivers, and the ocean; they had the fish, the deer and the elk to eat. Also, Native Americans respect the dead and were not willing to disturb the slave's burial place.

Four Grand Ronde Tribal members played roles in the production and one deceased Tribal member was remembered.

Casting for the film started a few years ago when Doyon joined Westerman on a visit to meet Grand Ronde youth. There, he also met Tribal member Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach and others who would become part of the cast.

Looking Wolf contributed his flute music to the score and also appeared in the movie playing his flute.

When Doyon got to know Reibach better, he learned about Reibach's uncle, Michael Harris Standing Elk Reibach, who passed on in 2005. After that, he took Standing Elk for the name of Westerman's character. Westerman plays an Elderly Indian who guides a young girl, Julie, in her quest to find the treasure.

"There's this 60-person crew all around us, these trucks, my son is there," said Reibach. "It's midnight in Manzanita, and I got to sit there singing drum songs and playing the flute with Standing Elk. It was just like my uncle was there."

"When he offered to change the name of the lead character to my uncle's name, I ended up giving him all my music for free," said Reibach. "I tore up the contract."

Siletz Tribal Council member and Cultural Specialist Robert Kentta served as Native American Traditions Consultant for the movie.

Grand Ronde Tribal member Leah Brisbois plays an Indian girl from the 1500s, when the Neahkahnie Legend is thought to have begun. "I'm looking out and I see this one little girl's face and I said, there's our little girl for the movie," said Doyon. "It was the granddaughter of Cheryl Kennedy, Leah Brisbois. I asked her if she might be interested."

"In our mind, there was going to be one scene where the image of her face transforms into the face of an Indian of the present day," he said.

Julie, the lead in this award-winning family movie is the present day Indian. She is played by Suzanne Marie Doyon, daughter of the filmmakers. As in real life, the character knows she has a small amount of Indian blood, but has never before celebrated or even investigated her culture.

In the movie, the Brisbois character watches as the gold and the body are first buried, when the Neahkahnie



A press photo from Richard Doyon shows three Grand Ronde residents from the cast. They are Tribal member Leah Brisbois, (l to r) Vernon Kennedy (Burns Paiute) and Tribal member Maria Rodriguez.

Legend began. Five hundred years later, the Suzanne Marie Doyon character uncovers the treasure.

As it turns out, Brisbois and Doyon have the same birthday.

Vernon Kennedy (Burns Paiute) and Grand Ronde Tribal member Maria Rodriguez performed with Brisbois and Reibach during the Vision Quest scene.

"I was just kind of amazed that I would be in the movie," said Kennedy. "I never thought I would be in a movie... It's like you're a celebrity now!"

Suzanne Marie Doyon plays a

these hundreds of years turns out to be a "wet stage" in North Carolina where the crew built the caves and shot the scene in five days.

Also as Hollywood would have it, the legend's name was changed to "Tillamook" for the movie. The producers believed that Tillamook (because of the cheese) would be better recognized across the country.

In other ways, though, the Doyon family story is not far from the movie's story. The Doyon family is from Los Angeles, and the family had for many years spent vacations in their summer house in Manzanita on the

nia," said Doyon. Doyon served as producer, co-writer with his wife, and character actor in the production. Newport Beach named it the Best Family Feature. Later on, the Toronto Film Festival also honored The Tillamook Treasure with a first place in the family category.

Each of the local actors put in about a day's worth of shooting to complete their parts, though much of their work was ultimately left on the cutting room floor.

Today, with the project completed and showing at film festivals around the country, the quest for domestic distribution continues.

"Foreign distribution is on," said Doyon, "but domestic is hard."

Doyon made use of a great many Oregon locations including Manzanita, Vernonia, Garibaldi, Wheeler, and Nehalem.

Making the movie was a real family affair, including family and friends among actors and crew.

The production also became a vehicle for the family to rediscover itself, and to look into its own Penobscot/Mik'maq Native roots.

"I got much more in touch with my own Native American heritage," said Doyon. "I'm mostly French Canadian. The family intermarried hundreds of years ago but records weren't kept."

"For the whole family, it was a bonding issue. There was a lot of stress, but it brought us closer together during the movie. And the kids did a wonderful job. I was just so proud of them."

"I made some new great friends, people from Grand Ronde, and all



Speaking to the audience after the movie, Producer, Co-writer and actor Richard Doyon presented many of those involved in the production including, from left, Tim Yett, guitarist who accompanies Tribal member Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach, next in line, an unidentified woman from Tillamook who supported the making of the movie, Doyon, and Tribal member Leah Brisbois.

transplanted California teenager whose visions and ultimate vision quest lead her to the cave where the treasure has long been waiting to be found by one who has been "chosen".

As Hollywood would have it, the watery cave bearing the treasure for

Oregon coast.

The family sold the house to raise the nearly \$1 million needed to make the movie.

The Tillamook Treasure is a family story all the way.

"It premiered last April at the Newport Beach Film Festival in Califor-

over, that I didn't know before."

Although the production has made the rounds of film festivals, including the Mid-Valley Video Festival in Salem at the end of February, Doyon continues to work on scheduling an official commercial opening in Tillamook. ■

Photo courtesy of Richard Doyon

Photo by Ron Karten