

Tribe, museum mark historic partnership

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

NEW YORK CITY — On Tuesday, June 15, the American Museum of Natural History and members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde gathered in the Frederick Phineas and Sandra Priest Rose Center for Earth and Space to publicly mark the 10th anniversary of an historic agreement recognizing the Tribes' spiritual and cultural connection to the Willamette meteorite, or Tomanowos.

The meteorite is the centerpiece of the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Hall of the Universe in the Manhattan-based museum which sits on the west side of Central Park.

Former Tribal Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison said a blessing before about 50 people who gathered for the 11 a.m. news conference.

Ellen V. Futter, president of the American Museum of Natural History, kicked off the event with a speech.

"I'm so excited that on the 10th anniversary of this historic agreement that I can see my friend and partner, Kathryn Harrison," Futter said. "Tomanowos did his job. This is a stirring day."

"We worked hard to reach this agreement and we hope to see it endure."

Harrison and Futter also joined forces on Wednesday, June 16, for an interview with museum staff to create a video about the 10th anniversary.

Harrison said the impetus for the Tribe in trying to repatriate Tomanowos was being informed by Tribal Cultural Resources employees that Tomanowos was at the museum and might be reclaimed under the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

"From there, it just progressed to, 'If we do get it, where are we going to put it?'" Harrison said. "One of things we looked at, if we go to court, how long would we be in court? Forever?"

"It came up just as we were completing the Rose Center and were



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison speaks during a press conference, as American Museum of Natural History President Ellen Futter looks on, about the 10th anniversary of an historic agreement recognizing the Tribes' connection to Tomanowos in the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Hall of the Universe at the museum in New York City on Tuesday, June 15.



Tribal Council member Toby McClary takes a photo of a basket from a western Oregon Tribe during a collections tour at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on Tuesday, June 15.

preparing to open it, which was intended to be a moment of great institutional triumph," Futter recalled.

"We had not considered that we

were doing anything that would have an impact on anyone else. And certainly did not mean to. For us, it was an enormous surprise in trying to do this in a way that did not upset the joy and excitement of the new Rose Center."

Although the controversy was presented initially to Harrison and Futter in a legal battle context, Futter said that a "shared spiritual approach" of wanting to work the controversy out helped craft the agreement.

"I think we inherited it in a confrontational, legal setting, and then the work of figuring out what was at stake and what each side cares about and really needs, and how do we work that out in way that doesn't have that animus. I think that is a long process that we were fortunate to have come out the way it did," Futter said.

"We had housing and other things we had to think about first," Harrison said. "It (repatriation) was high on our list, but it wasn't No. 1."

Futter said millions of museum visitors see Tomanowos

annually while the Tribe continues its annual visits and Tribal youth benefit from a summer internship program at the museum. Complementary plaques erected next to Tomanowos explain both its scientific and Native American cultural importance, respectively.

"This has been a glorious partnership and collaboration," Futter said. "I hope it continues for many years."

After Futter's speech, Tribal members Travis Mercier and museum intern Santiago Atanacio performed a song, which drew the attention of curious museum visitors on the higher floors.

Tomanowos is the largest meteorite ever found in the United States, weighing in at 15.5 tons. It was donated to the museum in 1906 and has been on almost continuous display since and been viewed by millions of visitors from around the world.

Harrison was Tribal chair in 2000 when the museum and Tribe signed a memorandum of understanding that kept the meteorite in New York City, but provided annual access to Grand Ronde Tribal members for religious and cultural events, as well as created the Tribal youth internship program.

After the news conference, Tribal members were then taken on a behind-the-scenes tour of the museum's anthropology collection, where they viewed Umpqua and Chasta Costa baskets and Shasta bows and arrows, among other Pacific Northwest Native American artifacts, held by the museum.

"It's been a sense of great accomplishment for the Tribe and museum to come to an agreement like this," Harrison said.

"It has exceeded our expectations," Futter said. "With a good spirit and an open mind, there are opportunities to work things out. This resolution offers a model of how things can be done." ■



John Hansen, right, collections manager in the Anthropology Division of the American Museum of Natural History, shows a holder made out of an elk antler to Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg, left, and Tribal Elder Raymond Petite during a tour of the collection at the museum on Tuesday, June 15.