

Bryan Mercier's excellent inaugural adventure

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

It pays to keep old friends, especially if they are now working in the White House.

For Bryan Mercier, manager of Business Operations for the Fish and Wildlife Program at Bonneville Power Administration, a friend like this, an unnamed White House source, recently scored for him two reserved seat tickets to President Barack Obama's second inauguration held on Jan. 21.

In addition to Mercier and his wife, Christine, 2009 Hatfield Fellow Dennis Worden and his fiancée also had friends with tickets for the top echelon of American ballroom politics.

Others paid \$1,600 a piece for such tickets.

The Obama administration, deciding not to look "insensitive to the country's economy," opened the ballroom to some 20,000 Obama supporters with only "Cheez-Its and pretzels" to eat all night.

"There was nowhere to sit for women in gowns and high heels, so they were literally having to sit on the floor," Mercier said.

The weather, with a wind chill registering about zero degrees, was not supportive. Many who waited an hour to get through security were not dressed for the weather, he added.

All that being said, Mercier was thrilled to be among those who suffered.

"There was a lot of energy and emotion in the room," Mercier said.

When the President and first lady Michelle Obama came out for a dance, Mercier said, "It turned into



Bryan Mercier and his wife, Christine, attended President Barack Obama's second inauguration held in Washington, D.C., on Monday, Jan. 21.

a teen concert, with all these successful, highly-ranked, professional folks rushing the stage where the Obamas were dancing. You could hear conversation about her dress. Everyone had a phone camera out. They were taking video.

"And then Jennifer Hudson came out."

Jamie Foxx, who won an Academy Award for portraying Ray Charles, sang when the Bidens came out for a dance.

Stevie Wonder, Alicia Keys, John Legend and Brad Paisley all performed over the course of the evening.

Mercier met his benefactor when both were working for different senators in Congress.



Photos courtesy of Bryan Mercier

Bryan Mercier's view of President Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., during the President's second inauguration on Monday, Jan. 21.

"The Indian community in Washington is very tight," Mercier said. "We work hard and we party hard."

Mercier long has worked on national Democratic issues, developing Native American positions for 2004 Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry, and early for Obama's 2008 campaign "when they gave him very little chance of succeeding. He'd only given a single good speech at that time," said Mercier.

The inauguration was the time to celebrate victories along the way, with four years into the future looking bright. Mercier and others celebrated because the good fight had once again become the winning fight.

"It's simple," Mercier said. "The Democrats have a better platform for Indian people."

No doubt, Mercier's years in the nation's capital, and his good work at federal agencies laid the groundwork for this inaugural weekend.

He worked as the Hatfield Fellow in Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith's Washington office in 2003-04; at the National Congress of the American Indians in 2004; the U.S. Forest Service from 2005-07; and at the U.S. Treasury from 2007-09.

In September, Mercier was an Oregon alternate-delegate for the

Democratic Party of Oregon at the Democratic National Convention held in Charlotte, N.C. He served on the Democratic Party of Oregon's Citizen Involvement Committee, that, he said, "reaches out to minority communities," helping to register Democrats in Tribal communities, meeting with party leaders to recommend events and build knowledge for reaching Native American communities.

Surrounding the official Inaugural Ball, the nation's capital hosted dozens of other balls and events. Among them, the Merciers attended one sponsored by Native American economic development organizations at the downtown Hard Rock Café, which is next to the famous Ford Theater.

Before the ball, the Merciers ran into Navajo leaders on the Washington Metro from the same small community that Christine calls home.

During the official ball, Mercier ran into a big fellow in the bathroom.

"He looked over and I said, 'Patrick Ewing?' and he said, 'Yep.'"

And during the swearing-in ceremony, from where the Merciers stood, it did not matter whether Beyonce lip-synced the national anthem. "There were audio problems," he said, "so we couldn't hear it, anyway." ■

Please join us Wednesday, February 20th for
Chinuk Family Literacy Night
 Dinner will be served.

DOES A KANGAROO HAVE A MOTHER, TOO?
 by Eric Carle



What: Chinuk Family Literacy Night.
 When: Wednesday, February 20th at 5pm
 Where: CTGR gym
 Who: EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!

All attending families will receive a book. We will be having dinner with the Preschool Literacy Night attendees and then breaking into groups for books and activities. We'd love to see you there!

Thrift store seeks volunteers

The Tina Miller Community Center Thrift Store, 110 B. St., Willamina, helps fund the after-school and weekend youth community center located in the old high school gym.

The thrift store is seeking volunteers who can help run the store, in addition to donated items and customers.

The store accepts clothes, books, knickknacks, etc., as donations. It is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and closed Sunday and Monday. Donations also can be left at the Wildwood Hotel and Restaurant in Willamina.

For more information on volunteering, call 503-876-7897.

The youth center and thrift store are nonprofit and 100 percent self-sustaining and volunteer-run. ■