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UMPQUA ■ MOLALLA ■ ROGUE RIVER ■ KALAPUYA ■ CHASTA

Tribal effort leads to Native name for new bridge

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

PORTLAND — When the Tri-Met Bridge Naming Committee unveiled Tilikum Crossing, the Bridge of the People, as the finalist from among hundreds of names nominated, it was a testament to a successful Grand Ronde effort to have a Native name selected for the transit bridge being built over the Willamette River.

On April 16, at the southwest corner of OMSI, along the Eastside Greenway Trail, more than 100 people gathered for the naming ceremony. There was a clear view of the bridge-in-progress through the clouds and mist of an overcast day.

The winning name came from Tribal Historian David Lewis and the Tribe's Language Program. Lewis also served on the nine-member Bridge Naming Committee.

Earlier, in 2013, Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor met with her Tri-Met counterpart.

"They were struggling with the dilemma that a lot of people wanted to have naming rights for the bridge," Taylor said. "That's when I suggested that a Tribal name be used. Give it a name that honors the original people of the Portland Basin. Name it for the people who make up today's Grand Ronde Tribe."

Taylor told Tri-Met officials that the Tribe would come up with a name that would represent the Tribe's ageless history in the area, but also "make it a name that would embrace all of the Portland metro community."

Taylor took the idea to Lewis, who consulted the Tribe's Language and Land and Culture staff. Together they came up with Tilikum, a Chinuk Wawa word for people, family or a gathering.

Historically, the word was spelled Tilixam, a Chinuk Wawa word that is difficult to pronounce.

"The 'x' sound has a slight sound almost like you are clearing your throat," said Kathy Cole, Cultural Outreach and Program manager



Photos by Michelle Alaimo



During a name revealing ceremony at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry in Portland on Wednesday, April 16, the new transit bridge over the Willamette River was officially christened Tilikum Crossing. The name was submitted by the Grand Ronde Tribe and it means Bridge of the People in Chinuk Wawa. Tribal drummers, including Bobby Mercier, left, and Brian Krehbiel performed during the ceremony. At left, Tribal Historian David Lewis speaks during the name revealing ceremony for the new transit bridge. Lewis was a member of the Bridge Naming Committee.

and Chinuk Wawa instructor.

In the interest of giving the public a word that is easy to pronounce, the Tribe's proposal choose the word to Tilikum, Lewis said, one of a few different acceptable spellings.

In January, Tilikum Crossing

joined Abigail Duniway, Cascadia Crossing and Wy'east as the final four names being considered. The public was invited to vote on their favorite.

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