

# 'You have to wonder did you just walk in the footprints of your ancestors?'

**SALMON continued  
from front page**

finished their line, Tribal Elder Greg Archuleta invited the men and young boys to do the same. As many as 50 people attended the ceremony.

Mercier said to those gathered that a longstanding agreement exists between Tribal peoples and salmon.

"What we did was recognize the laws we have between us and the salmon," said Mercier. "The agreement we have between us and the salmon is that he would forever feed us as long as we did not forget to sing to him and to honor him. By each one of us tapping that fish with those clubs it is each one of us saying to that fish that we remember that. We won't forget that. We won't forget that law we have between each other."

Mercier said when the singing stops, the salmon will cease returning.

"We'll remember to sing for you," said Mercier. "We'll remember to take the first fish and feed the people. We make sure that we do that and that is what we are doing here."

Mercier was joined by as many as 20 drummers and singers for a song to honor the deal struck eons ago with the first salmon.

Jade Unger and Marvin Archuleta filleted the fish on a white folding table to feed the people in attendance.

Tribal Historic Preservation Office Manager David Harrelson tended the fire and Mercier wrapped the bones, tails and heads in foil and placed them in the coals.

Greg Archuleta placed the first staked-out salmon fillet just before 2 p.m. and those gathered began to eat a potluck-style dinner shortly after 3 p.m.

"I think it's a very good thing that we renewed this ceremony after 130 years," said Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno. He was joined by fellow Tribal Council members Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr., Secretary Cheryle A. Kennedy, Denise Harvey and Jon A. George



**Tribal Elder Michael Mercier taps the first salmon on the head with a stone club as Tribal Elder Greg Archuleta looks on during the Tribe's fourth annual First Salmon Ceremony held at the McLean House in West Linn on Friday, May 6. Each person in attendance — women used a yew wood club — took a turn to show that they remember the obligations to the salmon and the traditional laws that guarantee the return of the salmon in Oregon's rivers.**

Visit the Tribe's  
**facebook**  
page to see more photos

at the gathering in West Linn.

Leno said the ceremony had added meaning this year after regaining the right from the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to take fish in a traditional way at Willamette Falls for ceremonial purposes.

"This year is really special because we just received some of our fishing rights back on the Willamette Falls," said Leno. "Jack (Giffen Jr.) said they went up and got fish right where our platform is going to be. So, when you tie the two together it's a pretty unique ceremony. It means a lot. You gather to honor the fish.

"You go to do these ceremonies and you feel like you've accomplished something and you're

that (the bridge, the cars, the sound of civilization) wasn't there," said Harvey. "For me, that's one of the things I enjoy about attending these events and participating in them is because I really value and appreciate that we are practicing some of our traditional values in our traditional ceremonies. I really like being a part of it. It's very meaningful to me."

Harvey said the renewal of the First Salmon Ceremony shows the Tribe can be unified and aware of traditional values.

"I'm proud of the people who are moving this forward and that we have people working for us that are passionate about it," said Harvey. "I think it's really important and I think it is good for our people to be a part of that and practicing that. It was really good energy. I like that we have people that want to bring those traditions back. I think that strengthens our Tribe and it shows respect to our Elders and our ancestors that were here before us that we are trying to bring back and carry on those traditions."

Mercier said the ceremony is about understanding and remembering to give back.

"It's important that we do it and that's what we're told," said Mercier. "Don't just take."

It seemed fitting that as Unger and Mercier washed down the table on which the salmon had just been filleted, the blood of this year's first fish was returned to the Earth. ■

going back in time. You have to wonder did you just walk in the footprints of your ancestors? Did they do the same thing?"

Harvey said the spot for this year's ceremony was beautiful and that it made her imagine a time when it would have been even more beautiful.

"You think back to the day when



**Drumming and singing was part of the Tribe's fourth annual First Salmon Ceremony held at the McLean House in West Linn on Friday, May 6.**

**Photos by  
Michelle Alaimo**

**Tribal Cultural Outreach Coordinator Bobby Mercier, right, hands the first salmon to Andrew Freeman, middle, and Tribal Elder Greg Archuleta after it was harvested at Willamette Falls on Friday, May 6.**

