

Every month since February 1987 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence. The Olympia FOR's program airs several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at www.tctv.net.

You can also watch the program described below (and many more than 150 of our previous monthly interview programs and also many special programs) at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org. Simply click the TV programs link, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch. Many of our website's TV program listings also include links to documents describing the program in Word and/or .pdf format.

July 2016

“Nisqually Canoe Journey”

by Glen Anderson, this TV series' producer and host

The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's TV program for July 2016 explores a powerful regional tradition organized by our region's Native American and First Nation tribes.

In the saltwater areas and shorelines throughout Western Washington and SW British Columbia, special summertime events have been happening since 1993 – after an earlier “Paddle to Seattle” in 1989. Tribal members paddle traditional dugout canoes from throughout our region and converge at the location of a different tribal host each year.

Two guests – **Hanford McCloud** and **Jeff Choke** – help us explore the 2016 Canoe Journey, the “Paddle to Nisqually.” Both guests are enrolled members of the Nisqually Tribe, and both have first-hand experience with this project. Their interview was warmly personal, besides being informative.

- **Hanford McCloud** is a member of the Nisqually Tribal Council, has 15 years of experience with this series of annual canoe journeys, and is active with the Leschi Heritage Foundation.
- **Jeff Choke** is newer to this canoe journey experience, but he is doing a lot of work to make the 2016 event a success, including feeding the participants and guests.

Basic information about the 2016 canoe journey

Before we discussed the overall canoe journey movement that tribes have organized for more than 20 years, we started with some basic information about the July 2016 canoe journey that will come to Olympia, hosted by the Nisqually Tribe. They expect approximately 110-120 canoes from throughout the Salish Sea (Puget Sound and north into Canadian waters) and the Pacific Ocean side of the Olympic Peninsula. In addition, a number of Native Americans from many other places will visit without canoes as part of the geographically broader Native community.

The website for this year's canoe journey – www.paddletonisqually.com – offers a large amount and variety of interesting information.

The overall movement for annual canoe journeys

These annual canoe journeys have been happening region-wide since 1993. Even before that, a 1989 “Paddle to Seattle” was part of Washington State’s centennial celebration. More tribes from Washington State and First Nations from British Columbia, Canada, have been participating in recent years.

These annual canoe journeys help pass the traditions from elders to current adults and on to the youngest generation. These traditions include not only canoeing skills, but also the songs, dances, and values – including practices about interacting respectfully and cooperatively with other tribes and welcoming visitors with hospitality and food. In ancient times this happened, so people are delighted and inspired and educated to be able to continue those traditional values and activities.

How these annual canoe journeys are planned, and how they operate

Each year’s canoe journey requires several years of thorough planning and organizing. Each year a different tribe offers to host the journey that will be happening a few years into the future, and the group of tribes makes the decision about who will host. Many people volunteer to organize various aspects of the journey, including safety and support for the canoes and those pulling the oars, enough hospitality and food for thousands of guests, huge tents and other infrastructure to host the singing and dancing events, and on and on.

Nisqually Tribe is hosting our region’s 2016 canoe journey

The Nisqually Tribe (www.nisqually-nsn.gov) is hosting our region’s 2016 canoe journey. Our guests talked about the huge amount of planning and huge workload for this to be successful. Canoes coming from various locations will stop and visit various tribes along their routes, including Suquamish.

110-120 canoes will arrive in Olympia in mid-afternoon Saturday July 30

They will arrive near Swantown Marina at the Port of Olympia. Activities on the Nisqually reservation (near Highway 510 between Lacey and Yelm) will occur afterward, including the August 1-6 “protocol,” which includes welcoming, singing, dancing, eating, etc. Look for information soon at www.paddletonisqually.com

The annual canoe journeys are very important for the tribes’ cultural and spiritual well-being, so it’s smart that some events are for Native people only. Also, they are planning a good number of events and activities open to the public. Look for information soon at www.paddletonisqually.com

Nisqually Tribe’s very old history, invasions by whites, 1970s “fish wars,” etc.

Many small bands of indigenous people have lived throughout our region for many thousands of years. Later they were grouped into “tribes” and forced off their traditional lands. For example, although the Nisqually reservation now is between Lacey and Yelm, the people lived in various small groups near the mouth of the Nisqually River where the wildlife refuge is now.

The water that comes down from Mount Rainier has brought life and livelihood, so remembering and caring for the water is crucial. Both of our TV guests wore shirts with that message, including the traditional language’s word for the message, “Don’t forget the water.”

The Nisqually people’s last traditional Chief, Leschi, was a great leader. The white territorial government convicted him of a murder for which he was innocent and hanged him in 1858. Finally, a century and a half later, in 2004, the Washington State House and Senate passed resolutions exonerating Leschi and saying he should not have been convicted. See the interesting website, www.washingtonhistoryonline.org/leschi/index.htm

Culturally as well as nutritionally, the Nisqually people have always relied on the fish. Over the years, white people were taking more and more of the fish from the Nisqually River and nearby waters, despite the treaty rights that should have protected greater Native access. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the controversy escalated – especially in the Nisqually River – and finally led to a federal court decision in favor of the tribes and protecting their fishing rights.

Some cultural similarities exist among a variety of Native American nations or tribes, but each nation or tribe also has its own culture and realities. People can learn more by visiting the Nisqually Tribe’s website, www.nisqually-nsn.gov

The future

Native Americans throughout the Western Hemisphere have suffered tremendously over the recent centuries. Every society wants a better future, so the Nisqually Tribe and other local tribes and nations are preparing for the future in several ways. With a strong sense of history and culture, they emphasize grounding younger generations in the wisdom and practices of elders. The annual canoe journeys and interconnections with other tribes and nations throughout our region are helping them build a stronger future.

How could non-Native people help with any aspects of the 2016 canoe journey?

The canoe journey can happen only if a good number of people help in a variety of ways. The Nisqually people invite non-Native people to help in a variety of ways. Visit www.paddletonisqually.com and click the link for “Support.” Also, you could phone the Canoe Journey Staff at (360) 456-5221 or toll free at (877) 768-8886

Sources of information

I enjoyed visiting the website, www.paddletonisqually.com and I enjoyed reading a lot of information and watching a number of videos there.

Information about the last traditional chief Leschi is at www.washingtonhistoryonline.org/leschi/index.htm

The Nisqually Tribe’s website is www.nisqually-nsn.gov

Further encouragement

When the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation holds our weekly vigils for peace and human rights, one of the signs we often hold says, “All people are one human family.” This TV interview helps us understand this in a richer way by helping us get to know the people who lived and thrived here long before white people arrived.

I deeply appreciate Hanford McCloud and Jeff Choke for being our guests during this interview and sharing their information and insights about the 2016 Paddle to Nisqually – this year’s regional canoe journey that will end in Olympia at the end of July and be the guests of the Nisqually Tribe, continuing into the first few days of August.

I encourage everyone to participate when the 2016 canoe journey arrives in Olympia at the end of July 2016 and in the next few days of activities. And I encourage you to visit the websites listed immediately above.

You can get information about a wide variety of issues related to peace, social justice and nonviolence by contacting the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation at (360) 491-9093 or info@olympiafor.org or www.olympiafor.org