

# SUQUAMISH TRIBE: Rescuing A Tradition

*By Christine Morente, Sun Staff — Jan 6th, 2002*

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The waters off Port Madison Indian Reservation were gentle, perfect for a rebirth witnessed by many.

At 1:15 p.m. Saturday, the singing and beating of the hand drums welcomed the SiyamS-tiwatl, a canoe made by the hands of six Suquamish youths.

Under the tutelage of Ray Natrall, the master carver of the Squamish Nation of British Columbia, the act of creating a canoe from a 999-year-old cedar was returned to the Suquamish Tribe of Kitsap after an absence of four generations.

"When we were around the canoe, we had our mind, spirit and everything on the canoe," 18-year-old Raymond Pondelick said. "I'm proud of what I've done. I'm interested in what was lost in our tribe, and I wanted to help in bringing it back."

Known to be expert basketmakers, fishermen and canoe builders, the Suquamish have lived in the Puget Sound area for thousands of years.

Not unlike other tribes in the United States, Suquamish descendants began losing what linked them to tribal life.

As the 37-foot-long, 4-foot-wide cedar boat rounded the tip of Bainbridge Island on Saturday and began approaching the shores of the Suquamish Tribal Center at Port Madison Indian Reservation, witnesses realized that something has changed within their family.

"It's like a new birth, a new change that helps our people more in trying to bring our traditions into full circle and inspire our youth to grow up in those ways," said Nancy Gibson, a Suquamish Spirit Daughter and hand drummer for the Longhouse Association. "It's a blessing to the tribe and for the new year."

The making of the canoe took a couple of years to plan and about \$26,000 to come together.

The Full Circle Carving Project, developed by the Suquamish Tribe Cultural Co-op Committee, began out of a dialogue with other canoe tribes.

The Suquamish Tribal Council then coordinated tribal funds and programs.

Six youths from the North Kitsap School District and Spectrum Community School in Kingston were chosen to live and work under Natrall's guidance in North Vancouver from September to Dec. 15.

The six apprentices were James Anderson, Erik Alexander, Calvin Medina, Raymond Pondelick, Sammy Mabe and Anthony Adams. Mabe and Adams left early. Their supervisor was Niccola

Armstrong.

The making of the cedar canoe is different from how things were arranged years ago.

Today, contracts had to be written and then there was the issue of the Canadian border.

"We didn't have borders then," said Jerome Jainga, education coordinator of the Suquamish Tribe. "It had to be understood that the teaching of the tradition needed to take place."

Blessed and cleansed by cedar boughs, the finished canoe will travel in the tribe's canoe journeys.

To Natrall, it was special for him to teach his apprentices, he said.

"It was an honor to have my brothers come be with me and help them learn who we are," he said. "Our culture is something we live. I gave whatever I could. It's in their hands on what they want to do."

Reach reporter Christine Morente at (360) 792-9210 or at [cmorente@thesunlink.com](mailto:cmorente@thesunlink.com).