

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

Oaklands Elementary School Unveils Legacy Totem Pole Project

VICTORIA, BC – In 2018, over 750 Oaklands Elementary students and staff, along with many parents and other community members, began carving a totem alongside Kakwəkə'wakw and Coast Salish artist and parent, Carey Newman (Hayalthkin'geme) and his assistant Tejas Collison. With animals selected by students, the totem celebrates community, honours Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and provides a path forward for the process of reconciliation.

“This project is about finding ways to integrate authentic cultural experiences into the classroom, because when I think about the future of reconciliation, it is the understanding of these children that fill me with hope,” said Carver Carey Newman.

The unveiling of the totem will take place on Thursday, May 27, 2021 at Oaklands Elementary School (main entrance). Carey Newman (Hayalthkin'geme)—best known for creating the Witness Blanket—will unveil the completed work at a ceremony and celebration, led by Lekwungen Knowledge Keeper, Bradley Yuxwelupton Dick.

“Respect and cooperation are at the forefront of this school-wide initiative,” said Mr. Newman. “When the students chose the animals back in 2018, the bear, wolf, and otter were voted in with cheers and applause, and the raven tricked its way to the top, becoming the main figures. Tucked amongst the other animals are an orca, frog, eagle, salmon and moon and thunderbird. Lastly, as the pandemic came along and changed everything for everyone, the resilient little hummingbird came along to remind us all how we can all help each other by doing what we can.”

This cross-curricular, multi-grade, and intergenerational project is also a journey of reconciliation and healing for the future. Students have learned from Elders, artists, storytellers, and educators about Indigenous traditional teachings, art, and decolonization. The totem has become a catalyst for social change as all students see themselves, their community, and histories reflected in what they are learning.

There is also a documentary film being made about this project that will be completed later this summer.

Unveiling of Legacy Totem Project

When: Thursday, May 27, 2021

Time: 11:15 a.m.—12:15 p.m.

Where: Main Entrance, Oaklands Elementary School, 2827 Belmont Avenue, Victoria, BC

Filming consent: Please liaise with principal to facilitate interviews

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For media enquiries:

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