



## New Interpretive Walkway Honours Coast Salish

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — This morning, Mayor Alan Lowe was joined by Chief Robert Sam of the Songhees Nation, Chief Andy Thomas of the Esquimalt Nation, Butch Dick, Coast Salish artist and member of the Songhees Nation, and project partners to celebrate the blessing and unveiling of the *Signs of Lekwungen*, (pronounced *Le-KWUNG-en*) a new interpretive walkway consisting of seven unique site markers located at culturally-significant sites along the Inner Harbour and surrounding areas.

The *Signs of Lekwungen* signifies the contributions of the Coast Salish people who have resided in the Victoria area for hundreds of years. The Songhees and Esquimalt Nations are part of the Coast Salish family and are descendants of the Lekwungen family groups. Lekwungen is the original language of the land.

“The City of Victoria is proud to have had the opportunity to collaborate with the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on a project that honours the artistic, historical and cultural contributions of the Coast Salish people,” said Mayor Alan Lowe. “The *Signs of Lekwungen* is a legacy to the traditional First Nations territories on which Victoria is built.”

Chief Robert Sam and Chief Andy Thomas nominated Butch Dick as the commissioned artist for the project. The artworks depict spindle whorls that were traditionally used by Coast Salish women to spin wool – considered the foundation of a Coast Salish family.

“I chose a traditional tool because it is synonymous with the culture of the Coast Salish Nation and honours the role women played in the community,” said Butch Dick. “The spindle whorl is an interesting metaphor, representing the weaving of a cultural tapestry of the people who originally inhabited this area.”

Each site marker consists of a bronze casting of an original cedar carving, conceptualized and carved by Butch Dick, which stems from a powder-coated aluminum pole. Each spindle whorl is anchored on an angle to a grey granite base, and sandblasted with a map of the Inner Harbour to illustrate the locations of the seven markers. The base’s top edge is inscribed with the traditional place name (where applicable), phonetically in Lekwungen, as well as in English. The concept for the base was developed by Richard Linzey, a Heritage Planner with the City at the time.

In 2005, the City of Victoria was designated a Cultural Capital of Canada by the Department of Canadian Heritage, Cultural Capitals of Canada Program, and was awarded funding to support seven arts and culture initiatives under the theme, *Celebrating Our Diversity*, one of which was a First Nations interpretive walkway.

The initial concept was to install the cedar carvings at the base of the spindles. Due to concerns over their preservation, it was decided that bronze castings would better serve the purpose. The carvings were cast in bronze by Jack Gibson, a casting specialist and well-respected sculptor among the First Nations. The process was funded through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities by way of a Provincial Community Tourism Grant, designed to assist local governments with tourism initiatives.

“The site markers reveal what has long been hidden,” said Ray Parks, CEO for the Provincial Capital Commission. “These artworks honour the spirit of the Coast Salish people and invite residents and visitors to learn more about Victoria’s rich history.”

“The Greater Victoria Harbour Authority is honoured to have participated in this important cultural project, where the Inner Harbour plays a significant role,” said Don Prittie, Board of Directors Chair for the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority. “We thank the ancestors of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations for helping make Victoria’s Inner Harbour the flourishing port that it is today.”

Each of Butch Dick’s cedar carvings is unique and will be on display in the foyer of City Hall until the end of October.

Brochures that include a map and information on the cultural-significance of the seven sites are available at a variety of venues including Victoria City Hall, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations Band offices, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Tourism Victoria, the Royal BC Museum, and Greater Victoria Public Libraries, among others. The *Signs of Lekwungen* is an interpretive walkway for residents and visitors to explore. For more information, visit: [www.victoria.ca/signsoflekwungen](http://www.victoria.ca/signsoflekwungen)

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## BACKGROUNDER - SIGNS OF LEKWUNGEN

The Signs of Lekwungen (pronounced *Le-KWUNG-en*) is a new interpretive walkway along the Inner Harbour and surrounding areas that honours the traditional territories and contributions of the Coast Salish people who have resided in the Victoria area for hundreds of years. The Songhees and Esquimalt Nations are part of the Coast Salish family and are descendants of the Lekwungen family groups. Lekwungen is the original language of the land.

- *Signs of Lekwungen* consists of seven unique site markers placed at culturally-significant sites to the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.
- The artworks depict the spindle whorl (pronounced *worl*), a tool traditionally used by Coast Salish women to spin wool – considered to be the foundation of a Coast Salish family.
- Each site marker has a bronze casting of an original cedar carving, conceptualized and carved by Coast Salish artist Butch Dick.
- Each bronze casting is a disk, 106.7 centimetres (42 inches) in diameter, which is anchored to a brown powder-coated aluminum pole.
- A site marker is 2.5 metres (8 feet, 4 inches) in height and weighs close to 455 kilograms (1,000 pounds).
- Each spindle whorl is anchored on an angle to a grey granite base. Underneath lies a sandblasted map of the Inner Harbour, illustrating the locations of the seven markers.
- The base's top is inscribed with the traditional place name (where applicable), phonetically in Lekwungen as well as in English.

### Carvings

Clear, close-grain red cedar was used to carve the whorls. The cedar tree was, and still is, sacred to the Coast Salish. From the cedar tree, ancestors were able to make such items as clothing, blankets, houses, canoes, paddles, totem poles and paint brushes.

Butch Dick is the master carver for the *Signs of Lekwungen*. Trained in fine art and graphic design, Butch has taught First Nations Art and Culture in School District 61 for more than 20 years and is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Victoria, teaching an Indigenous Learning course.

His sons, artists Clarence and Bradley Dick, assisted him with two of the whorl carvings. Below is a list of the site marker locations and the themes of each carving. The Lekwungen and English names for each site marker and their cultural significance can be found in the *Signs of Lekwungen* brochure or online at [www.victoria.ca/signsoflekwungen](http://www.victoria.ca/signsoflekwungen)

#### Songhees Point

- Carving theme: Four Seasons of the Salmon Family
- The four salmon families are represented: Sockeye, Coho, Chum and Spring

Site of the South West Bastion of the Hudson's Bay Company Fort  
(north side of the Malahat building on Wharf Street)

- Carving theme: Walk in Two Worlds
- Recognizes colonization

#### Outside City Hall

- Carving theme: Seim Speaker (a person held in high esteem who speaks for the people)
- The eagle is the messenger of the sun (grandfather) and the moon (grandmother) who guides man, represented by the figure in the middle of the carving.

#### Lower Causeway of Inner Harbour

- Carving theme: Four Directions of the Eagle
- Eagles are the messengers of the sun (grandfather) and the moon (grandmother) and are far-sighted and strong

#### Beacon Hill "Lookout"

- Carving theme: The Cairns (rocks placed in circular patterns to signify ancient burial sites)
- Sea otters are the keepers of spiritual powers; "little people" are playful spirits who assist others

#### Royal BC Museum

- Carving theme: Celebrate Diversity
- Three Nations on Vancouver Island: Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth and Coast Salish

#### Laurel Point

- Carving theme: Four Winds
- Each wind carries a healing power and a song

#### **Budget:**

The project's \$331,000 budget was made possible by:

- in-kind contributions of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations;
- City of Victoria's financial contribution of \$87,798 and in-kind services;
- funding support in the amount of \$85,626 from the Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005 Cultural Capitals of Canada Program;
- a Community Tourism Grant of \$44,777 from the Province of British Columbia, administered by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities; and
- \$38,250 by both the Provincial Capital Commission and Greater Victoria Harbour Authority.