



Members of the Ha Kus Teyea Celebration Committee address the TTC Elders' Council on February 4, 2008.

TTC Elders embrace Celebration

The TTC Committee organizing the first-ever Ha Kus Teyea Celebration set for July 2009 has the full support of the TTC Elder's Council.

Elders, who gathered for a council meeting February 4, 2009, fully embraced the upcoming celebration and offered many insights into making the historical Celebration a success.

The week-long Inland Tlingit gathering will take place July 22-28 and is expected to attract thousands of people to Teslin. The Ha Kus Tyea Celebration will be based on a model of the biannual Juneau Celebration and will offer traditional ceremonies, language nests, traditional harvests, an artist's market and juried art show.

At the February 4 meeting, members of the committee presented the Elders Council with a briefing note detailing organizational efforts to date.

Committee member Bev Morris, who with the help of fellow committee member Isabelle Dewhurst, has already drafted a schedule of events for the celebration and presented it to the Elders Council.

"There's a lot of work ahead of us and I believe we can do it if we all pull together," Morris said, adding, "I've seen it happening at the opening of this facility (Heritage Centre). It was like it took on a life of its own during the four days. Everyone pulled together at the

11th hour and it took on a life of its own."

Morris says for her the main objective of the gathering is to strengthen the Inland Tlingit relationship with her ancestors in Alaska.

"It might be small, but when you look at the celebration in Alaska and how it grew, I know we can do it. My main objective is to strengthen our relationship over there. There's a lot of resources we can learn from. Speaking from Dakh'lawedi, I know they have a lot of songs they have recorded and we need to start learning those songs and learning our history," Morris told the Elders.

Duane Aucoin, who is also on the organizing committee, says the idea for such an Inland Celebration dates back to a special Dahk Ka Gathering held in Carcross in 2006.

"The Elders there wanted to have a gathering in the Dahk Ka territory, because we're always going to Alaska and they were saying it's about time we invite these people to be guests on our land."

This resulted in the Teslin Tlingit Council's General Council passing a resolution to recognize Tlingit Heritage in April 2008.

"Our Elders at the DahKha gathering in Carcross wanted a more traditional gathering, and that's the thinking that's going on for us."

“We’re not trying to duplicate what’s going on in Juneau. We’re trying to make it more simply based on the land, giving our Elders an opportunity to get together to talk about Ha Kus Teyea, talk about our language and our stories.”

Ishkitan Clan Leader Sam Johnston thanked the committee for its work to date and was the first of many to volunteer to help.

“You’ve put together a nice package,” Johnston told the committee. “All we need now is lots of volunteers to pull this together and make this happen. Whether it’s to help with storytelling or the history in Teslin. I’d like to see some Elders step forward to help the committee in making this happen.”

And step forward the Elders did.

Following Sam Johnston, Kukkhitan Clan Leader Jimmy Johnston was next in line to offer his full support for the event.

“We’ll show them that we can do this. This will be good for us. We will have our name in Teslin known for many years. If I can do anything, I’m willing to put my name forward and volunteer,” Johnston said.

Other volunteers who have stepped forward to date include Ken Bailey, Pauline Sidney, Annie Johnston, Adeleine Webber and Jane Smarch.

Committee member Sharon Shorty says she knew the Celebration could be a success after the committee’s visit to Juneau to meet with Sealaska to get some

“We should have donations from the crafts people so we can have a really good auction. I’m willing to put in mocassins or a pair of mitts.”

- Pauline Sidney

insights into planning the event.

“People are excited. They want to know how we live inland, they want our berries. They want our hides. We’ve been going there since the 80s. These are our friends. Our culture and our heritage is priceless and I’d like to see support for this initiative,” Shorty said.

“We’ll be having a very busy six months,” noted Eric Morris during the close of the committee’s presentation to the Elders Council.

“We want to provide you with the assurance that we will do our very best. We have every confidence that we can put ourselves in a position to be very proud of this event.”

“It’s the first of its kind in Teslin and it’s the first of its kind in the Yukon.”

TTC Celebration Committee members Duane Aucoin, Eric Morris and Sharon Shorty distributed Herring Eggs at the Elders Council meeting on February 4, 2009. These eggs were sent from Juneau to thank TTC for inviting those from the Coast to the upcoming Ha Kus Teyea Celebration set to begin July 22, 2009 in Teslin.

