

# Tseshah't's wolf ritual returns to waterfront

## 'Wolf Tower' unveiled at Harbour Quay on National Indigenous Peoples Day

**ELENA RARDON**  
Alberni Valley News

Wolves have returned to Harbour Quay in Port Alberni.

Hundreds of people gathered at Port Alberni's waterfront on National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21) to watch Tseshah't First Nation members perform their wolf ritual at the site of their former winter village for the first time in 100 years, as the new "Wolf Tower" was unveiled.

Prior to European contact, Tseshah't First Nation had a winter village and ceremonial site at the foot of Argyle Street known as Tlukwatk-wuu7is (or Wolf Ritual Beach). Each winter, the Tlookwaana (or wolf ritual) was performed here.

But after the arrival of English schooner *Meg Merrilies* and Edward Stamp in 1860, the Tseshah't people were displaced from their village under threat of cannon fire so that a sawmill could be built in its place.

It was on June 21 that Tseshah't First Nation finally returned to Tlukwatk-wuu7is to perform their wolf ritual and mark National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada. A young man dressed as a wolf was led on stage in chains labelled with phrases like "inter-generational trauma" and "residential school" and "colonialism."

The chains were broken, and the wolf began to dance as Tseshah't singers drummed and sang.

"Growing up in Port Alberni, I was taught to be proud that the first export sawmill operated in our community," Port Alberni Mayor Sharie Minions acknowledged on Tuesday, June 21. "But it wasn't until recently

that I learned that sawmill was constructed on a site wrongfully taken from the Tseshah't Nation."

The City of Port Alberni and Tseshah't First Nation partnered for the event on Tuesday and the unveiling of the Wolf Tower. The tower, which was once a clock tower, has now been decorated with artwork by Tseshah't artist Willard Gallic Jr. that depicts the wolf ritual.

"We can't undo that history, but we can move forward differently," Minions said.

It was a full day of celebration at Harbour Quay, with vendors, food, music and dancing. Tseshah't welcomed leaders from multiple Nuu-chah-nulth nations, as well as MP Gord Johns, MLA Josie Osborne and City of Port Alberni councillors and past mayors. Fires were lit at 8 a.m. and burned into the evening for a traditional salmon barbecue.

Tseshah't First Nation Elected Chief Councillor Ken Watts noted that the potlatch ban was in place up until 1951, but there were Tseshah't people who celebrated in secret to keep their songs alive.

"There was a time in our history where we weren't allowed to sing and we weren't allowed to dance," said Watts. "But there were people who stood up and they made sure that those songs didn't die. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be able to sing the songs we sing today. It's important to acknowledge all the people who came before us and laid the foundation. Because if it wasn't for them, this celebration would not be happening."

**There was a time in our history when we weren't allowed to sing and we weren't allowed to dance.**

— Ken Watts



Dancers with Tseshah't First Nation perform the Tlookwaana, or Wolf Ritual, at Harbour Quay. (ELENA RARDON / ALBERNI VALLEY NEWS)



Dancers with Tseshah't First Nation welcome visitors to Harbour Quay. (ELENA RARDON / ALBERNI VALLEY NEWS)



The Wolf Tower is officially unveiled at Harbour Quay. (ELENA RARDON / ALBERNI VALLEY NEWS)



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