

August 8 was a good day for the W̱SÁNEĆ First nation whose Traditional Homeland includes S,DÁYES/ Pender, S,ḴFAḴ/Mayne, and TEḴTEḴSEN/Saturna as well as much of the Saanich Peninsula. On August 8 W̱SÁNEĆ Elders, community members and youth came to the base of the road overlooking Bedwell Harbour to ceremonially reclaim the ancient village of QENEN,IW̱, located at the site that Poets Cove Resort now occupies.

Two new panels were added to the original 13 moon calendar installation unveiled in May 2019 to help launch the TETÁĆES Climate Action Project. The two new panels describe the inextricable relationship between the village of QENEN,IW̱, and SXIXTE the original W̱SÁNEĆ reef net site near the entrance to Bedwell Harbour.

The artistically designed panels by W̱SÁNEĆ artist Sarah Jim tell the story of QENEN,IW̱, and SXIXTE with impactful images. Hereditary Chief Eric Pelkey (WICKINEM) observed: “The W̱SÁNEĆ People have maintained the connection between QENEN,IW̱, and SXIXTE for thousands of years before colonization. Our People have a responsibility to restore the connection and reclaim our ČELÁNEN (world view/birthright).”

SENĆOTEN language specialist and teacher Renee Sampson (SXEDFELISIYE) opened the ceremonies with a beautiful song she composed to protect one of her daughters from restless spirits while her daughter participated in the 2020 5-day TETÁĆES Climate Action course held at Poets Cove resort. One of the highlights of the day was the enchanting blessing song by SXEDFELISIYE and the accompanying dance by the inspiring W̱SÁNEĆ dancers.

Elder Belinda Claxton (SELILIYE) assisted in unveiling the two new panels and expressed gratitude for the growing community to community relationship between the W̱SÁNEĆ community and the S,DÁYES community. SELILIYE acknowledged the restlessness of ancestral relations resulting for the disruption of a burial ground during the reconstruction of Poets Cove resort in 2002. She also pointed out the reburial sanctuary across the road from the resort that was built to honour the ancestors. The sanctuary was erected ceremonially in 2008 by W̱SÁNEĆ Elders with support from the then resort general manager Walter Kohli.

W̱SÁNEĆ artist Sarah Jim who designed the panels with striking images that capture the spirit of the intertwined relationship between QENEN,IW̱, and SXIXTE. The QENEN,IW̱ panel contains a QR Code which connects you to both a SENĆOTEN and English version of the QENEN,IW̱ story. The QR code on the SXIXTE panel connects to a video showing the ceremonial revival of the reef net technology by the W̱SÁNEĆ youth and young adult reef net team.

The keynote presentation was given by Hereditary Chief Eric Pelkey, great grandson of former Hereditary Chief Louie Pelkey who was born at QENEN,IW̱ in the 1860s. Chief Pelkey animated the story of QENEN,IW̱ describing the dramatic event that occurred there and how QENEN,IW̱ got its name which translates as- “What you have witnessed.” The story reinforces the W̱SÁNEĆ Traditional Law prohibiting greed and requiring sharing of the gifts from the creator. Chief Pelkey acknowledged the strong support from the S,DÁYES community and thanked the SGI Community Resources Society and the South Pender Historical Society for their leadership.

The ceremonies concluded with Elders John Elliott (J,SINTEN) and his brother Elder James Elliott (STIWET) speaking of their culture from the heart and both gifted us with inspired and inspiring songs. A salmon picnic co-hosted by the CRC TETÁCES Reconcilli-Action team, the South Pender Historical Society, and the S,DÁYES Truth and Reconciliation Circle was held for invited guests on Reserve Land.

As SXEDFELISIYE reminds us, WSÁNEĆ ÁŁE ŁTE U, TU,E ÁŁE - we are still here.

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