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Today is July 24, 2020

Swinomish have fond farewell for Whitney Meissner

Bill Reynolds

Wednesday, July 22, 2020 5:52 PM

Former La Conner Schools Superintendent Dr. Whitney Meissner received a warm send-off, symbolized by receipt of a Pendleton blanket, during a farewell ceremony at the Swinomish Pavilions Thursday afternoon.

Meissner has begun a new assignment as an administrator with the Lake Washington School District after three years in La Conner.

Swinomish officials, staff and students gathered beneath one of the tribal community's semi-open "cedar hats," where they wore masks and practiced social distancing as required by state coronavirus-related mandates.

Meissner's tenure included vocal staff complaints spiraling into calls for her resignation from the employee unions and a successful levy election campaign. It ended with her and the district navigating a March end of on-campus learning and the COVID-19 crisis this spring.

The Swinomish ceremony focused on her work to strengthen ties between the District and the tribal community, a relationship that had been strained due to a shift of the local school tax burden east of the channel due to the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court's Great Wolf Lodge decision.

Former Swinomish Tribal Senate Chairman Brian Cladoosby said Meissner "jumped right in" to help bridge that gap on behalf of students.

"The goal," said Cladoosby, referring to the long-established Swinomish Birth-To-Six Program and its funding of paraprofessionals at La Conner Schools, "is to continue to educate our kids."

Cladoosby, one of several speakers, said Meissner had "witnessed what Swinomish is doing with education."

Swinomish Tribal Community Senator Barb James echoed Cladoosby.

"You truly are a friend of the Swinomish," she said. "You've helped a lot of people in the time you've been here."

Meissner was feted with several gifts. In addition to the blanket, she was presented flowers and a plant from the Swinomish Education Department and a custom hat from the Swinomish Environmental Department bearing art designed by Tribal Senator Kevin Paul.

Paul spoke, sang and drummed during the ceremony.

"We want to wish you well in your next chapter," Paul said to Meissner. "You touched a lot of our people."

Meissner herself was clearly touched by the tributes.



SAYING GOODBYE TO A FRIEND – Whitney Meissner was honored by the Swinomish Tribal Indian Community last week with a farewell ceremony and a Pendleton blanket. Meissner resigned as La Conner School District superintendent June 30 for a job with the Lake Washington School District – Photo courtesy of Lauren Reynolds

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“The greatest gift,” Meissner stressed, “is friendship.”

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