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Elder has helped Tulalip Tribes grow and prosper

Stan Jones has been a force like no other for Tulalip Tribes

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TULALIP — Long before he met two U.S. presidents, negotiated with Donald Trump, dined at Bill Gates' home or threw out the first pitch at a Mariners game, Stan Jones sifted worms from sacks of flour his family picked up at the reservation commissary.

As a Depression-era child, the future leader of the Tulalip Tribes wore leaky government-surplus shoes and felt conspicuous in donated knickers. There was no electricity or indoor plumbing at home, and drinking water came from a creek.

As a young man, Jones served as a Marine private during World War II and smuggled leftovers from officers' quarters to homeless Japanese children in the months after the United States dropped the atom bomb on Nagasaki.

And later, in logging camps, his hands wore callouses day after day from using crosscut saws. He shoveled coal from boxcars, drove fuel and log trucks, worked as an electrician and hauled in salmon from his fishing nets.

All of those experiences shaped a work ethic and resolve he brought to the Tulalip Tribes Board of Directors for the past 44 years. No one has served longer. In 15 board elections, Jones never lost.

This spring, "Scho-Hallem" — Jones' Indian name, meaning No. 1 Warrior — didn't run for a 16th term on one of the region's most powerful decision-making bodies, despite a nudge from some tribal elders to do so.

"This is the right time for me," said Jones, whose handshake remains firm at 83.

Jones has been in the middle of landmark federal court battles to win treaty fishing rights and aided efforts to restore lost customs and reassert culture. He has said "thanks but no thanks" when the tribes briefly entertained Trump's offer to finance a casino.

He has been stopped in airports by tourists who have requested photos because of his resemblance to rock 'n roll legend Elvis Presley. Sometimes, he obliges them with a "Thank you very much" — an Elvis trademark.

Mainly Jones has pushed for tribal sovereignty and self-sufficiency for the tribal confederation and its 4,000 members. When he was first elected to the board in 1966, the tribes had three employees. Today, there are 3,600 jobs and the tribes is one of the largest employers in Snohomish County. Its Quil Ceda Village business park generates \$720 million in annual casino and retail revenues.

Those who know Jones best say it's a mistake to underestimate him. He can be disarmingly friendly while convincing others to take his side. He's memorized Robert's Rules of Order and can wield a heavy gavel when running meetings. The man with an eighth-grade education is well-read, served 16 years as a bank board of director and is known to critique tribal lawyers' legal briefs. He eschews computers for pen and paper, recording his thoughts and conversations in notebooks that he can quickly retrieve years later.

"I always found him to be agreeable even when you disagreed with him," said Wayne Williams, 81, a retired tribal business manager who has known Jones since childhood.

"All generations seem to be taken with Stan," Williams said. "They like and respect and trust him. I think that was the marvelous thing. To be trusted by your people is the mark of a real leader."

"Stan did a lot of the thinking for us," said Charles "Red" Sheldon, 93, who was a veteran on the tribal board when Jones was first elected.

Gov. Chris Gregoire has crossed paths with Jones many times over the years as state attorney general and governor. They drove together to a 2006 dinner meeting at Bill Gates' home where Chinese President Hu Jintao and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were among the guests.

"Because of his visionary leadership, the Tulalip Tribes have become known across the country for their entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to their culture," Gregoire said. "The government-to-government relationship Washington state now enjoys with the

Jones said he once sat in President Bill Clinton's chair in the White House "It was very comfortable and I felt like I belonged there."



Tulalip Tribes and other tribal governments was shaped by his pragmatic approach to working together to solve common problems.”

Jones served as tribal chairman for roughly half the time he was on the board.

“Whether he was tribal chairman or one of the seven on the board, Stan was a strong leader,” said Don Hatch, who served on the tribal board several times. “He provided leadership that helped get us to where we are right now.”

Humble beginnings

The fact that Jones became a tribal leader is sometimes a little hard for him to comprehend.

At times in his childhood, he felt alone.

His mother died when he was 3. He and his three siblings were sent to a Tacoma hospital for Indian children with tuberculosis when he was 9. Jones spent three years on bed rest and being spoon-fed cod liver oil, separated from his brothers and sister, who were placed in different wards.

He often found himself in trouble. April 19, 1936, was no exception. He was locked in a closet as a punishment when he heard a nurse mention to co-workers that a boy in Ward D had died. His name, she said, was Norman “Jack” Jones. Stan Jones sobbed behind the closet door. Jack was his older brother. The only time he left the hospital and saw his father during those three years was at his brother’s funeral.

By the time he was released at age 12, Stan Jones felt lost and confused. He told the man who drove him back to the Tulalip Indian Reservation that he didn’t want to be dropped off at his dad’s house.

His father, George Jones, a tribal leader and one of the few tribal members in the early 1900s to attend college, had remarried and had started a second family that would eventually number 14 children. Jones moved from home to home among his relatives, never choosing to stay long for fear of burdening them. On cold nights, he shared beds with his cousins. Sometimes, he slept beneath brush in the woods.

“I didn’t know where I belonged,” Jones said.

His experience in public school was a mix of friendships and hardships. He enjoyed sports and was the starting left end on an undefeated junior high school football team. The Tulalip Boarding School — an institution determined to conform Indian children into society by stripping away their language and customs — closed shortly before Jones began elementary school. Many white children in Marysville didn’t know what to think of their new Indian classmates, Jones said.

When he quit school after eighth grade to work in the woods, no one came looking for him. No one said anything.

At 17 in 1943, he enlisted in the Marines and he was called to active duty a year later. He served in the 2nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Marine Division in the Pacific. In Saipan, he was the only minority in his unit and was assigned his own tent when others had up to four people in one.

There were times at night he was the lone Marine on guard duty, spooked by darkness, eerie sounds and fear of Japanese soldiers as he walked the jungle perimeter. More than six decades later, those jungle noises come back to him at night and wake him from his sleep.

The nine months of occupation in Nagasaki seared in his mind images of children scarred by the atomic bomb and of refugees thankful for food scraps and simple acts of compassion.

Today, he finds it sad that he can speak more Japanese phrases he learned during the war than he can the Lushootseed language of his ancestors.

In 1950, Jones married Seattle resident JoAnn Barrie. She’d been smitten after a friend showed her a black-and-white photo of four guys she knew from Tulalip. The friend arranged for a double date. Jones and Barrie married two years later and celebrated their 60th anniversary in February.

Called to service

In 1966, Jones was paid a visit from Harriette Dover, who had served as the first female chairwoman of the tribal board. Dover, who tirelessly campaigned to keep Indian traditions alive, urged Jones to run for the board. He was elected with 69 votes, a reflection of how small the tribal confederation was at the time.

State Rep. John McCoy, the first Tulalip Tribal member to be elected to the Legislature, said Jones’ work ethic served the tribes well. A former tribal business manager, McCoy remembers Jones spending eight-hour days on tribal business followed by two or three hours readying his fishing boat at the Tulalip Marina.

Jones (left) recently caught up with Billy Frank (center), a Nisqually tribal member who he joined in fighting for treaty fishing rights in the 1960's and 1970's. Tulalip tribal member Glen Gobin is at right.



What people didn't see after that was the two hours Jones would spend at night poring over federal documents at home, said his daughter, Teri Gobin.

"He was reading constantly. There would be foot-high piles of documents, boring, dry federal documents and contracts," she said. "He wanted every bit of knowledge he could get on anything."

Mason Morisset, a Seattle lawyer who specializes in tribal treaty rights, said Jones, a lifelong fisherman, and fellow tribal member Bernie Gobin brought important knowledge, testimony and negotiating savvy in the 1970s to the bitter court fight that ended with the Boldt decision. Restoring treaty rights, the verdict awarded several tribes half the salmon in their "usual and accustomed fishing grounds." It has been expanded to include more authority over habitat that affect the fisheries and over access to shellfish.

"He knew all about fishing from the ground up and therefore he knew about its importance as a treaty right to the tribal people like no one else," Morisset said.

The controversial court case carried a heavy price. Jones lost white friends he once fished with. Tribal fishermen, believing there was safety in numbers, soon formed small fleets for protection on the waters. Fishermen on both sides carried guns.

"It was like a big war out there, but it was our treaty right," Jones said.

Dover approached Jones and a few other tribal members again in 1976 when she wanted to revive the ancient First Salmon Ceremony federal officials had outlawed in the early 1900s. Dover recited the Indian words and songs that Jones wrote down phonetically in English the best he could. It was a small gathering then, but today, the ceremony to honor the first salmon runs each spring is celebrated by dozens of tribal members.

Jones' profile grew nationally in the 1980s and 1990s. He was appointed the chairman of the newly formed National Indian Gaming Task Force in 1982. A few years later, the Tulalip Tribes signed the first compact with the state allowing for gambling on the reservation.

He later met with Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and he still wears a maroon bathrobe given to him by Trump when the tribes briefly negotiated with him and other gambling industry heavyweights.

"We decided it's not going to be theirs; it's going to be ours," Jones said. "I'm just glad we went that direction."

Gambling and tourism gave the tribes financial strength Jones never could have imagined. In his private hours, he wrestled with inner turmoil.

Something was wrong with his son, Stan Jones Jr.

Sonny, as his family and friends called him, seemed restless and depressed. He'd already accomplished a lot, attending the University of Washington and twice winning election to the tribal board. But the problems grew worse and he eventually moved in with his parents. Some doctors suggested he had Pick's disease, a rare neurodegenerative condition marked by personality change, uncharacteristically impulsive behavior and memory loss. Jones watched helplessly as his son lost his speech and needed 24-hour care. Sonny died in 1996 at the age of 45.

All the while, Jones advocated for economic development and education, health, housing and senior citizen services for the tribes. He wanted to see the tribes regain land it once owned but lost. Once down to 600 acres, the tribes now own more than three-fifths of their 22,000-acre reservation.

"He carried himself with such grace," said current tribal chairman Mel Sheldon.

Jones' legacy is his ability to teach others, Sheldon said, and his greatest skill was keeping fellow tribal members aware of what their leaders were doing.

"He was always teaching us in his own way, especially when it came to treaty rights and sovereignty," Sheldon said. "Stan always cared about his people."

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Jones' memoir

Stan Jones, a leader with the Tulalip Tribes for more than four decades, recently self-published a book entitled "'Our Way' Hoy yud dud" about his life on and off the reservation. The book can be purchased at the Tulalip Resort Casino in the casino and hotel.

Stan Jones scans Tulalip Bay from the grounds outside the old Tulalip tribal center and longhouse during a recent afternoon sunbreak.

