

Alaska. BEYOND»

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IDAHO

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AND BUSINESS BENEFITS**

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THE REGION»

BELLINGHAM, WA

COAST SALISH CULTURE

» At the touch of a button, you can hear the voice of a Lummi teenager speaking her tribe's language: "New'ileng ne schaleche." (Welcome, my friends and relatives.)

She and 10 other students recorded a series of words and phrases in the Lummi language, which can be heard at audio stations in the new permanent "People of the Sea and Cedar" exhibit in the Lightcatcher building at the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham, Washington.

The students' contributions add to the museum's showcase of historical and contemporary Coast Salish perspectives.

Two years ago, the museum sought feedback from visitors through in-person surveys to gauge their experiences and determine what else they wanted to see from the museum. The most requested exhibit, at 43 percent, was one on Native Americans. At the time, the museum had a modest Coast Salish exhibit, but it was outdated and only open twice a year. It was time for a change.

A year after the survey, the museum began developing a permanent Coast Salish exhibit, in collaboration with tribes such as the Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe.

The 2,316-square-foot exhibit features videos of a contemporary Nooksack totem carver and a Lummi basket weaver, plus a rotating display of physical pieces, such as cedar hats, blankets, clothing, handmade tools, and a cedar canoe that hangs from the ceiling.

Visitors can explore through the exhibit on their own or attend a docent-led tour to learn more about specific artifacts and local tribes. In addition, interactive experiences encourage learning. Exhibitgoers can deconstruct a miniature cedar-plank house, or "cook" with a bentwood box, which is made by wetting wood, then bending the sides and letting it harden into a box shape.

The gallery tells an important story, says Christina Claassen, marketing and public relations manager for the Whatcom Museum, which is also a Smithsonian Affiliate. "This is a unique opportunity to share this information," she says. To learn more, see whatcommuseum.org. —Leah Allen



» Historical photos, clockwise from top: A Northwest Coast Native woman; a Quinault girl wears shell ornaments; Lummi elders gather to re-emphasize treaty rights, circa 1914.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: KISER PHOTO CO.; WHATCOM MUSEUM #1946.24.27; QUINULT GIRL WITH SHELL ORNAMENTS, EDWARD S. CURTIS COLLECTION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS LC-USZ62-108467; LUMMI ELDERS, COLLECTION OF 'TH'ONET' ESTHER (JOHNNIE) FIDELLE, PHOTO BY LESLIE CORBETT, WHATCOM MUSEUM #3889