



SOUNDINGS

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Connecting
College and
Community

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A photograph of an elderly couple, Ralph and Karen Munro, sitting on a grassy bank next to a body of water. Ralph is on the left, wearing a dark jacket and sunglasses. Karen is on the right, wearing a light blue shirt and dark pants, also wearing sunglasses. A large, fluffy brown dog is lying on the ground to the right of the couple. The background shows a calm body of water reflecting the sky, with a forested hill in the distance.

Ralph and Karen Munro:
Our Partners in Preserving the Past

"So many of them are not going to be archaeologists," Karen says.

She tells the story of an acquaintance who currently works at the Legislature, who took part in one of the summer field-work sessions.

"It broadened his life so much."

For the partners in this adventure, the Munros' generous philosophy about the site is striking and appreciated.

"You couldn't have better property owners for an archaeological site," says Croes. "They are partners and advocates and fund-raisers. They see this as important to everyone's heritage, and that's rare."

"I always say this about Ralph and Karen: They are true historic preservation ambassadors," says Foster. "All people's pasts are important, and they teach thousands of people that."

The Munros are equally appreciative of their partners and of the way the property and project are fostering understanding.

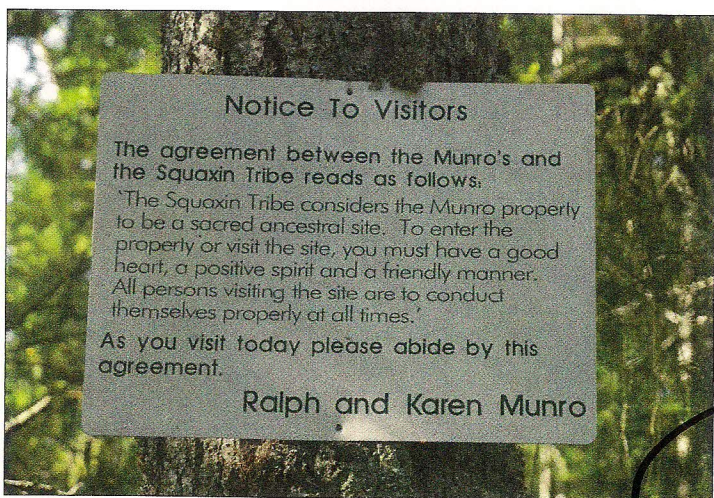
The site has become a beacon for Native American cultural preservation. The Munros point out that they have had tribes from across the country visit the site and learn about wet site archaeology on its beach. The artifacts discovered — via agreement between the Munros, the Tribe and the college — are transferred to the Tribe, to be housed in the Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center on the Tribe's reservation.

"We have so much respect for the Tribe that if they said 'stop,' we'd stop," the Munros say.

"The college has really become a piece of the glue that holds these groups together," says Ralph. "We think it's just a fabulous institution to have here."

"We are honored that Ralph and Karen are such supporters and partners in this unique relationship with the college and the Squaxin Island Tribe," says Pumphrey. "Without their understanding of what is at stake here, the partnership would not have come together."

On summer Thursdays, when the site is open for public tours, the Munros' neighbors often come to visit the site. They have sometimes ended up teaching the couple a thing or two about their property. One elderly neighbor showed up to tell tales of swimming from the Munros' beach as a child.



Visitors are required to read the sign before entering the quarry site.



Photo by Kathleen Hawes

The partners gather to honor the extraction of a buried basket at the Mud Bay site last summer. (Top left to right) Ralph Munro, Raymond McCloud with wife and daughter (below), Dr. Gerald Pumphrey, Josh Mason, (bottom left to right) Margaret Seymour-Henry, Rhonda Foster, Dale Croes.

"Things we had no idea about," says Ralph.

The Munros take pride that the site has fostered learning opportunities not just in local history in general and Squaxin Island Tribe history particularly, but it's been used as a classroom beyond anthropology. They credit Croes for that.

"He wants everyone to have a learning experience," they say. They point to the college's Computer Aided Drafting Program students who, as part of their surveying instruction, came out and surveyed the archaeological site when the project began.

"Something they wouldn't do anywhere else in America," says Ralph.

Once the excavation began, Croes and his students discovered they needed more efficient ways to sift through the material they were digging up. Student in the college's Welding Program designed and built a unique apparatus for sorting through the detritus of sand, silt and broken shell materials.

The Munros have also taken steps to preserve the past for the future. They have sold the development rights to the property to a consortium of local preservation interests which include: the Capital Land Trust, the State Department of Ecology, and the State Department of Fish and Wildlife. Together the consortium will protect the three miles of stunning beach-front shoreline that rims the Munro farm forever.

"It's inspired some of our neighbors to do the same thing," says Ralph.

The Munros' Triple Creek Farm emits an almost Zen-like aura of warmth and serenity. The site itself is clearly precious to the Munros, to the partners, and to the neighbors who have warmed to the hordes of trowel-toting students. A visitor wants to bring a book, find a hammock and never leave.

But to enter this honored ground, you must leave behind two things: cigarettes and dogs (except for the Munros' cocker spaniel Molly, the Princess of Triple Creek). And you are required to bring one thing: a good heart. Because, as Foster will tell you, the ancestors are watching.

KPB