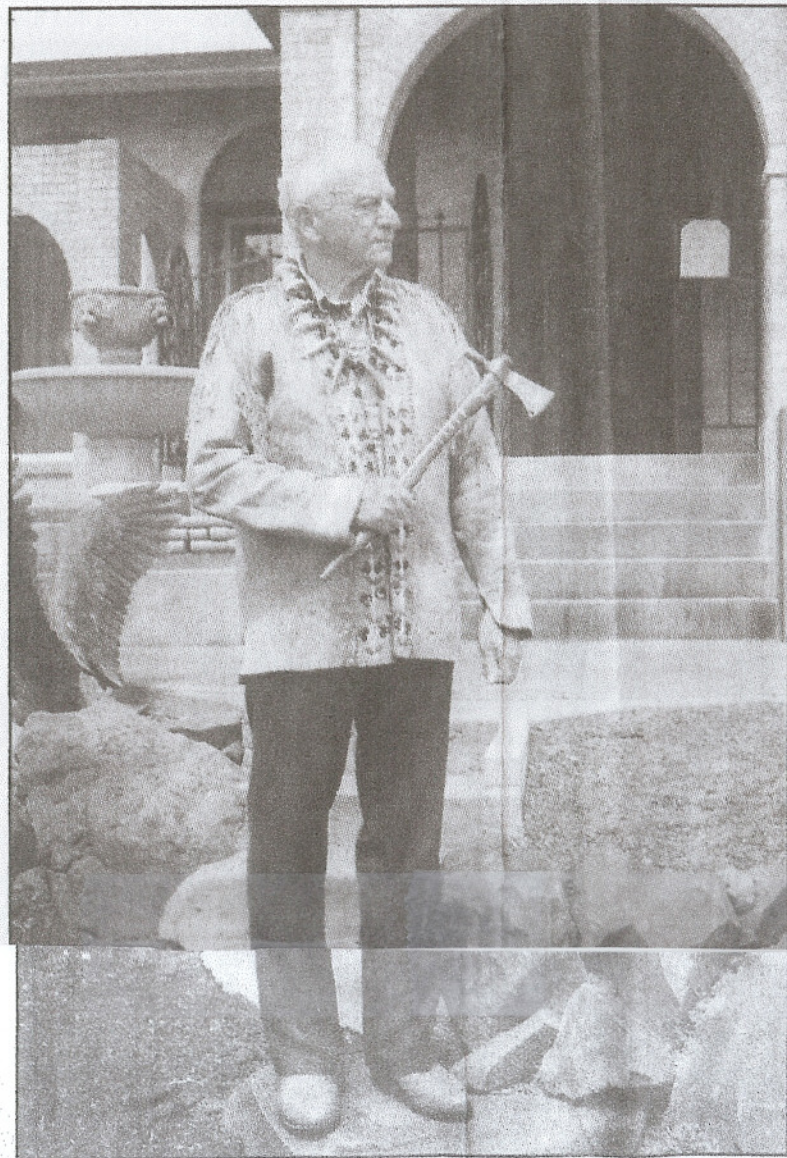


'I think we won the war'

Coastal activist of American Indian blood to be memorialized in Seaside

By LAUREL EDDY
The Daily Astorian



SEASIDE — “If you had a statue made of you, wouldn’t you be a little embarrassed?” Wilbur Ternyik asked rhetorically.

A life-size bronze bust of Ternyik will be placed inside the Gateway to Discovery building in May. It is a natural history center in Seaside that shows the history of the area, including the nearby estuary, and local American Indian tribes.

Ternyik, 80, agreed to the statue partly because he feels it is past time for a tribute to the Clatsop tribe. He is a descendant of Solomon Smith and his Clatsop wife Celiast, the daughter of Chief Coboway, who assisted Lewis and Clark during their stay at the West Coast.

Ternyik is also being honored for his volunteer work, including time as the mayor of Florence, a Port of Siuslaw

commissioner and chairman of the Oregon Coastal Conservation and Development Commission, which worked from 1971 to 1975 to develop land-use guidelines for the Oregon Coast.

The statue was commissioned by The Bridges Foundation of Turner. “Wearing his Indian jacket and carrying a tomahawk, Wilbur Ternyik spent 40 years volunteering to help coastal communities,” Executive Director Kathy Bridges said.

Ternyik frequently wears a Cree jacket and used a pipe tomahawk for a gavel as chairman of the coastal commission and as



Submitted Photo
Sculptor Lorenzo Ghiglieri stands beside his sculpted likeness of Wilbur Ternyik.

Courtesy of The Register-Guard
Wilbur Ternyik is embarrassed to have a statue of him installed, but feels it is appropriate to have a tribute to the Clatsop American Indian tribe.



LORI ASSA — The Daily Astorian
The Gateway to Discovery in Seaside will be the home of the Wilbur Ternyik statue. The statue was commissioned by The Bridges Foundation of Turner.

Ternyik: Gateway to Discovery is a natural history center

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mayor. "Just got to be part of me, I guess," he said. "You can have it both ways, it's a peace pipe and then it's got the business end." He is pictured with the jacket and tomahawk for the statue.

Ternyik said the statue is not just a tribute to him, but also to the other 30 original commission members.

When first organized, they didn't know where to start, he said. He noticed in other state management programs that while the beach was cared for, there were no plans for land just a few hundred yards from the ocean. The commission eventually recommended the coastal management zone be extended to the top of the coast range, and that recommendation was followed. With a few exceptions, the entire watershed was included.

The commission inventoried coastal resources and made recommendations for rules to protect them. A great deal of compromise was required, because some commission members thought the rules were too stringent or too lenient. "We had some really tough fights," Ternyik said.

He made the tie-breaking vote on the issue of mitigation for wetlands, requiring new ones be built if others were destroyed by construction. He said a member of the commission wanted him removed for that.

"It was the most intense four years of my life," he said. Over time, coastal cities and counties have incorporated most of the recommendations into ordinances. Ternyik said that does not mean the battle has been won against the "feeding frenzy" of coastal development, but if the ordinances are followed, the development will be conducted properly.

"I think we won the war," he said. "We keep hearing that Oregon's probably got the best coastal management plan in the country."

The commission still exists, now known as the Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association.

Ternyik was born in Astoria and raised in Warrenton, then transferred to Florence for his job and has lived there ever since. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II and was wounded on the island of Okinawa in Japan. He was a telephone lineman, but had finished his duties and all the stretcher bearers had been shot, so he volunteered to carry stretchers. "I came back on my own stretcher," he said.

He raised five children in Florence and rehabilitated birds and animals for the state game commission for 15 years out of his home. He cared for anything from turtles to small bears.

He said the bears were the most interesting. "They have the personality of people," he said, recalling a baby bear of about five pounds who was very sweet and another the same size who had temper tantrums.

Ternyik still works six to seven days a week, delineating the boundaries of wetlands and arranging for mitigation of wetland destruction. According to Bridges, he has gained international recognition as an expert in sand dunes stabilization and delineation and restoration of coastal wetlands. He worked for 20 years to obtain funding from the federal government for jetties for the Florence area, frequently traveling to Washington, D.C., to appear in front of House and Senate committees.

He does not like the amount of development taking place on the coast, even if it is economically beneficial. "Some of what's going on, I think, is very ugly," he said.

Ternyik feels the state of Oregon has forgotten the Clatsops exist, and he hopes the statue will remind people of them. He said the tribe was devastated by smallpox.

Ternyik is happy to have Oregon artist Lorenzo Ghiglieri creating his statue. "He's world-famous," Ternyik said. Ghiglieri said the image is meant to portray the soul of Ternyik and immortalize him. Wood artist Rainy Arago Lehrman is designing and fabricating the base from Sitka spruce. The statue is scheduled to be presented in Florence in April before being moved to Seaside in May.

The Gateway to Discovery is a natural history center at Neawanna Point at the north end of Seaside. It was created by a partnership of the North Coast Land Conservancy, Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes, Seaside Museum and Historical Society, Seaside Native American Project and WEB Discovery Program.

Conservancy Director Neal Maine said he sees the statue as the Clatsops coming home, as well as recognizing Ternyik's efforts in coastal zone management. Ternyik helped the conservancy inventory the wetlands on the land.