

BACKGROUND ON THE SQUAMISH NATION

From time immemorial, People of the Squamish First Nation people have lived, and continue to live, in the Greater Vancouver area, Gibson's Landing and the Squamish River watershed up to Whistler on the west coast of British Columbia. (source: *Assertion of Title*, approved text)

The Squamish people lived a bountiful life, as they harvested and shared the rich resources that were all around them. The oceans and rivers teemed with salmon; forests were filled with wild game; fresh berries and root vegetables grew throughout the valleys; and towering cedar and fir trees provided endless firewood and the strongest of raw materials for the creation of shelter, canoes and ceremonial icons such as masks, rattles, Welcome poles, Mortuary poles and House posts. They lived communally, in family longhouses that were built to accommodate extended families from multiple generations. The cultural values that have guided the Squamish are grounded in the concept of reciprocity or the sharing of wealth.

This concept is shared and celebrated throughout the Coast Salish region, as families would gather each year to participate in ceremonial gatherings "to give away or redistribute wealth". These gatherings, even today, take place in the longhouses and are hosted by Families - the head of the family known as an hereditary Siyam'. The Siyam', in the name of his family shared with the People both food and goods. Sacred ceremonies and rituals, obtained through family inheritance, would go on for days while food, goods, song, dance and spiritual gifts were shared..

Squamish history has been handed down from generation to generation through an oral history. According to elders, there were at times conflicts with other nations and the People faced many hardships which challenged their ingenuity, but all these things also hardened their character. But by all accounts, they lived together in harmony and celebrated life in one of the most beautiful spots on the planet.

"There's basically three ways we can approach each other," says Squamish Nation hereditary Chief Gibby Jacob. "With an open hand – for a handout. With a fist – to do battle. Or with a handshake – to create a partnership. We prefer the third option."

Perhaps the best example of this "partnership" can be seen in the precedent setting "shared legacies" agreement between four distinct Aboriginal nations, the Vancouver 2010 Bid Corporation and the province of British Columbia.

For the first time in history, aboriginals will share (as equal partners) in the hosting of the Olympic Games (in this case, the "Four Host First Nations" are the Squamish, Lil'wat, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam). Fourteen of the 20 Olympic and Paralympic events are scheduled to take place in the Nation's shared territories.

"We're truly honoured to be a co-host for the Games," said Chief Jacob, who was instrumental in negotiating the Olympic agreement. He who now sits on the Board of

Directors for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games as a representative of both the Squamish Nation and the Lil'wat Nation.

“It’s a true win/win situation – as we have an opportunity to join British Columbia in showcasing our province and our way of life. The games have also provided much needed employment for our people – and significant returns for various First Nations enterprises.”

An 8,000-square-foot 2010 Aboriginal Pavilion located in downtown Vancouver will showcase Aboriginal culture and cuisine and featuring a trading post, a great hall, a feast house and theatre.

Another partnership that was recently formed between the Squamish Nation, the Lil'wat Nation, Bell Canada and the Province of British Columbia is the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler. This 28,000 square foot facility features award-winning architecture that houses authentic Squamish and Lil'wat artifacts, hands-on demonstrations, a theatre, gift shop and meeting centre.