Fourth is BIG business

Fireworks stands have deep roots on Chehalis Reservation

Another Fourth of July has come and gone. Although the holiday landed on Wednesday and business has slowed in recent years because of dry weather, there was still plenty of excitement on the Chehalis Reservation.

Each year, tribal members, spouses and children ages 14 and older set up stands on the reservation. And for three weeks, thousands of people shop at Native American-owned businesses spread out both up and down the hill on Anderson Road and the few still down on Moon Road.

When tribal members first started selling fireworks, they would set up and sell them out of the back of

See FIREWORKS, page 2

Sacred voyage begins on traditional lands

Chehalis Canoe Family kicks off annual journey

By Frazier Myer

The Chehalis Canoe Family welcomed the tribal community to the 2018 Canoe Journey Launch Celebration on July 10 at Percy’s Landing, one of the tribe’s historic sites on the banks of the Chehalis River.

The tranquil spot is named in honor of previous Chairman and highly regarded tribal member Percy Youckton. Historic Preservations Officer Dan Penn explained how Percy helped the tribe get out of some rough times. The area was selected because of the role Percy had in the progression of the tribe and commitment and care for the Chehalis peoples’ waterways and

See JOURNEY, page 12
their trucks. When previous Chehalis Tribe Chairman Percy Youckton established a fireworks ordinance, people began constructing stands to operate businesses from.

In the beginning, there were 15 fireworks stands that eventually grew to more than 100 stands. To create a large customer base and grow each season, stand owners became savvy business people and used various forms of advertising. They came up with creative names and painted their stands vibrant colors, put out flyers and even ran ads on local radio stations. For the most part, stand owners relied on word of mouth and that customer satisfaction would keep people coming back.

Many tribal members realized having a fireworks stand is expensive and a lot of hard work, but it can be worth it if you continue to build clientele. Repeat customers are instrumental in the success of the fireworks business. Knowing how to make deals and sending customers home happy also helps the flow of fireworks sales.

In recent years, the number of stands has decreased. There were roughly 70 stands this year, but the business has become more family oriented and workers are utilizing the advancement of technology to their benefit. Many businesses advertise through social media and now accept credit or debit card payments from smart phones.

Out of eight wholesale distributors, two are local tribal member wholesale businesses. Many fireworks stand owners get to see free samples at displays throughout the season to entice stand owners to purchase from them.

Tribal member Barnaby Canales operates one of the wholesale businesses. He has helped put on the big fireworks extravaganza at the softball fields on the Fourth of July. The show is one of the tribe’s main attractions. It brings in hundreds of people from around the region to witness the Chehalis Tribe light up the sky with 320 salutes.

Canales said he wishes to thank Chehalis Tribe Chairman Harry Pickernell Sr. for allowing the tribe to purchase the machine and equipment to “make the show possible.”

FIREWORKS
From page 1

Hector Canales Jr., Dustin Klatush and others prep fireworks for the tribe’s big show.

Festive fireworks are loaded onto a pickup truck.

Far left: Children get their thrills as they gear up for the Fourth down at Thunder Valley.

Left: Families are excited as they score deals on firework cakes, Saturn missiles and Roman candles.
Parades get royal touch

The 2018 Chehalis Tribal Royalty is actively dedicating their time by representing the tribe at various events during their first couple months as royalty.

Swede Day Parade

The Chehalis Tribal Royalty continued their annual tradition of participating in Rochester’s Swede Day Parade on June 16.

Dressed in Native American regalia, the group traveled the streets of Rochester in the Chehalis Canoe Family’s canoe.

The youth tossed out candy to excited kids while smiling and waving to crowds lining the streets.

The Events Department, families and young royalty members helped make this year’s event possible.

The tribal royalty even took home a second-place ribbon for their participation in the float competition.

Oakville celebrates

With a population of less than 700, the town of Oakville is usually pretty quiet. However, the Fourth of July Parade on July 7 provided festive exhilaration.

The Chehalis Tribal Police department escorted the Chehalis Tribal Royalty. Again, they made themselves at home inside the canoe “Tulap” on the parade route.

Margaret Shortman pulled the canoe in her pink and black Titan pickup truck.

The royalty committee tossed candy and waved to the crowd in traditional parade fashion while the Chehalis Canoe Family followed on foot singing and drumming.

For one of the royalty members, it was the very first parade!

Elder Helen Sanders was selected as the Grand Marshall, and she led the parade in a sleek Corvette. This wasn’t the only stylish car in town as a car show featured shiny rides.

The afternoon was complete with a rodeo, horse rides and vendors selling arts and crafts.

Above: Chehalis Tribal Royalty took part in the Swede Day Parade and the Fourth of July Parade.

Left: Elder Helen Sanders was Grand Marshall of the Oakville parade.

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

6-8 P.M. TUESDAY, AUG. 7, CHEHALIS TRIBAL POLICE DEPARTMENT PARKING LOT

Enjoy burgers, hot dogs, cotton candy, popcorn, a bouncy house and a dunk tank! Check out police cars and equipment while getting to know neighbors and police officers in our community.

• Event aims to create safer, more caring places to live

BURN BAN

BECAUSE OF DRY CONDITIONS:

■ No burning yard debris
■ No open flames
■ No fireworks allowed

CHEHALIS TRIBAL DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
360-273-5911

BECAUSE OF DRY CONDITIONS:

■ No burning yard debris
■ No open flames
■ No fireworks allowed

CHEHALIS TRIBAL DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
360-273-5911
Events staff provide services such as Tribal Days and tournaments

The Events Department was formed in 2009 to manage the need to organize and hold events throughout the year and to help with bookings of the newly built Community Center and other tribal facilities.

Cheryle Starr worked in the department alone from 2009 until 2012 when Philip Youckton was hired to work alongside her.

Fun facts: Events was actually part of the Finance Department from 2009-2013 under Director Kris Salmon. In 2014, it was moved over to the Facilities & Grounds Department under Dan “Bones” Gleason. Leroy Boyd was hired as the newest member of the events team in 2018.

This year, we have held two successful tournaments.

In March, the annual All-Native Men’s Basketball Tournament brought in 14 teams to play; in May, Chehalis Tribal Days featured 40 baseball and softball teams and many vendors on the Chehalis Reservation.

In April, we hosted the inaugural Elders Luncheon where we welcomed more than 400 elders from around the Pacific Northwest. We will continue to move forward, mostly promoting involvement and participation from both our employees and our community.

Meet the folks who keep things moving

Lawrence SpottedBird
Chehalis Tribal Loan Fund welcomes new executive director

My name is Lawrence SpottedBird and I am honored to be working for the Chehalis Tribal Loan Fund as the Executive Director. My first day was on Wednesday, June 20.

As a business development consultant, I have worked all of my professional life with American Indians and Alaska Natives to promote economic development in remote communities in Oklahoma, Nebraska, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, California and Minnesota.

I graduated from the University of Central Oklahoma with a degree in business administration and initially studied architecture and participated in collegiate wrestling at the University of Oklahoma.

An early proponent of Indian gaming development in the 1980s (developing high-stakes bingo operations in Oklahoma), I am now an advocate for tribal international trade as a means of advancing the economies of remote Indian communities and strengthening the sovereign state of tribal governments.

Since 2006, I have owned a business development consulting company, SpottedBird Development, LLC. In 2014, I formed TRIBE (Technology & Resources International Business Exchange) in partnership with a New York-based Korean business development professional. Its focus is to facilitate international trade for American Indian tribes. I also sit on the Board of Directors of Two Rivers CDC – a native-controlled community development corporation based in Washington state. Additionally, I am appointed to the Advisory Board of the Korea Heavy Industry and Development Company based in Seoul.

I am prepared to draw on my professional experience to help the Chehalis Tribal Loan Fund grow in its capacity to support small loan needs of Chehalis Tribal members and other tribal members in our region who qualify for our various loans. I have admired the Chehalis Tribe for its leadership in developing the economy of this region and look forward to getting to know many of the Chehalis tribal leaders, tribal members and employees in the course of my work here for the CTLF.

I reside in Federal Way with my wife, Lanie, and have lived in Washington (with a couple of stints in Southeast Alaska) since 1997. I am a veteran of the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam era and am proud to be a member of my Kiowa Warrior societies such as the Ton Kon Gah, Ohomah Lodge and Kiowa Tiah Piah Society. I am also a member of the Sitka Veterans Association and a lifetime member of the Yakama Warriors Association.
Prep for Hwy. 12 road work

*WSDOT plans to minimize impact during fireworks season*

This article is a reminder to the community about the upcoming roundabout construction on Anderson Road and Moon Road during 2019.

One topic of discussion regarding the roundabouts is the effect construction might have on traffic. There will be an impact between the months of March through October on both Anderson Road and Moon Road.

A detailed construction schedule has not been developed at this time.

The Planning Department has worked closely with the Washington State Department of Transportation, which is responsible for the projects, and informed them of the importance of the months of June and July for the Chehalis Tribe and tribal members because of fireworks season.

WSDOT is fully aware of the importance of traffic flow and is creating a schedule to minimize impact during that time.

The Planning Department will continue to work with WSDOT to ensure they take into consideration the impact construction will have on the tribe and tribal businesses.

Here are answers to some of the most frequent questions:

**What brought on this project?**

WSDOT’s main focus is safety. Anderson Road and Moon Road both have had a significant number of accidents, including fatalities in recent years. This project is designed to make the stretch of Highway 12 safer for all travelers.

**How long will construction take?**

The project will kick off March 2019 and wrap up in October.

**Who is paying for construction?**

WSDOT is funding the project. The tribe is not responsible for costs.

**Will large trucks be able to use the roundabouts?**

Yes. The roundabouts are designed to accommodate vehicles of all sizes, including emergency vehicles, buses, farm equipment and semi-trucks with trailers.

**Is the tribe involved in design of the roundabouts?**

Yes, we are working with WSDOT to ensure the tribe is represented and it is clear drivers have entered the territory of the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation.
Clinic aims to prevent falls

In-home help for elderly and others at risk of injury is on the way through program

By Chehalis Tribal Wellness Center Director Denise Walker and Deborah Behre, DPM

Chehalis Tribal Wellness Center staff members have been gearing up to start a falls and injury prevention program.

Trained staff will assess your home or your loved one’s home and discuss how to lower or eliminate your risks. We will reach out to those at risk, but you also call the Wellness Center to request a home visit for yourself or a loved one.

Dr. Deborah Behre, podiatrist at the Wellness Center, is passionate about this program and the need to implement it in our community.

Statistics show that every second of every day, an adult age 65 or older falls. Every 20 minutes, an older adult dies from a fall. One in every five falls is serious for an older adult and results in traumatic brain injury, fracture or death.

SAIL (Stay Active and Independent for Life) is an exercise that improves strength, fitness and balance. It is designed for older adults. It can be done sitting or standing. Wellness Center Staff are taking this training to be able to provide SAIL classes to the community.

— Information provided by the National Indian Council on Aging, the National Council on Aging and the Centers for Disease Control

American Indian/Alaska Native Elders report the greatest percentage of falls (34.2 percent) of all races/ethnicities. Falls are the third-leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths of American Indians of all ages, behind poisoning and motor vehicle accidents.

Despite these statistics, falls are NOT an inevitable consequence of aging and they can be prevented. Exercise that improves strength, fitness and balance is the single most important activity adults can do to stay active and reduce their chance of falling.

— Information provided by the National Indian Council on Aging, the National Council on Aging and the Centers for Disease Control

RECIPES

Trauma Balm: Arnica, cottonwood, cayenne, peppermint and rosemary essential oils and beeswax

Lip Balm: Beeswax, virgin olive oil and lemongrass essential oil

Students harness the power of nature to make healing balm.

Beauty of natural balm

By Christina Hicks, Community Wellness Manager

Prevention staff invited Winter Strong to teach a Trauma Balm and Lip Balm class on June 19.

Participants learned by diving right into the process of making the wonderfully healing remedies alongside Winter. She provided the recipes to make both natural medicines and taught how to identify each plant used for ingredients.

After students worked up an appetite, they shared a meal.

We thoroughly enjoyed having Winter come out to

Chehalis Reservation to share her wisdom on traditional medicines with all of us.

The event was paid for by SPIPA Cancer Program.

Mammogram Clinic

8 a.m.-3 p.m. Sept. 27: Swedish Women’s Wellness Clinic. Call your health care provider to schedule.

Diabetes Clinic

8 a.m.-noon Aug. 16: Patients need labs, medicine review, foot/diabetes/physical exams and a uric acid blood test.

Community Walk

Noon Aug. 16: Join others for a fun fitness walk. Starts at the Chehalis Tribal Wellness Center.

Dr. Behre Foot Clinic

8 a.m.-noon Aug. 14, Sept. 17; 1-4 p.m. Aug. 30, Sept. 5: The Chehalis Tribal Wellness Center has a podiatrist available for all foot care needs.

For More Information

Call Sandra Dickenson at 360-709-1660 or Christina Hicks at 360-709-1741.
Are you WIC eligible?

Are you pregnant or breastfeeding? Does your family have a child younger than 5? Have you missed your WIC appointment and want to reschedule?

It’s a challenge to be a parent of a newborn or a toddler. We know you want the best for your baby/child and we’re here to help. At your appointment, we will:

- Check to see whether you qualify
- Check your child’s growth (You only need to bring your child to WIC twice a year for measurements.)
- Talk about your family’s health and nutrition needs
- Tell you about other helpful programs
- Share how to shop with WIC checks and receive them that day.

Participant comments

- “I was worried about my baby choking on food so I asked WIC staff. She told me how to prepare the food to avoid choking problems and how important it is for my baby to practice chewing at 8 months. She gave us information about choking so we can read it again at home.”
- “Breastfeeding is best for my baby. I knew I was going to breastfeed. WIC staff encouraged me and gave me some tips to give me confidence. She also gave me a number to call 24/7 if I had a questions or concerns. It really helped; breastfeeding is going great!”
- “The kids’ vegetable booklet I got from WIC has some great recipes. My family loves the recipes and I’ll make them again.”
- “WIC staff understood my concern about my parents and auntie feeding my child sweet treats and sodas. We came up with a plan on how to talk with my family.”
- “The tips I got from WIC staff about picky eating helped a lot. I’m feeding my child at regular times for meals and snacks and we’ve cut back on juice and milk to the recommended amounts. My son is eating so much now! The picky eater is history.”

Health fund reminder

By Denise Walker, Chehalis Tribal Wellness Center Director

The Tribal Member Health Fund was established to assist enrolled Chehalis tribal members pay for health care that goes above and beyond the Purchased Referred Care (PRC and previously CHS) payment and to assist enrolled members living outside of contract health service delivery areas with health expenses when requested.

This is not in place of an insurance policy and members are still required to sign up for an alternate resource to see if they are eligible for any source such as Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, etc.

The purpose of the policy is to establish guidelines and regulations to ensure all enrolled Chehalis tribal members are treated fairly and equitably while ensuring a fiscally sound process for expenditures of the Tribal Member Health Funds is in place.

GET A COPY OF POLICY

You can pick one up at the Chehalis Tribal Wellness Center or call to request a mailed copy. I can answer questions about the policy or its contents. Please stop by the Wellness Center or 360-273-5504. In my absence, you can speak with Meghan Eaton or Debra Shortman.

Contact us

Call the SPIPA WIC line at 360-462-3224 to sign up or reschedule. Please leave a message and we will call you back within a couple days, usually within a few hours.

Online calendar

Visit CHEHALISTRIBE.ORG for a calendar of activities that programs post through the IT Department help desk. At the bottom of the page, you’ll find “Calendar Events” and “Tribal News” for newsletters.

Make foot care a priority

Meet with Chehalis Tribal Wellness Center Podiatrist Dr. Deborah Behre

Dates/times

- 8 a.m.-noon
  Aug. 14, Sept. 17
- 1-4 p.m. Aug. 30, Sept. 5

Contact

Please call the clinic to schedule your appointment at 360-273-5504.
Best wishes to Head Start grads

Sweet celebration wishes children well on academic journey

Children smiled and their eyes beamed with pride during Head Start Graduation on June 7 in the Community Center. The gym was decorated to honor families and friends who came to witness the 23 children who are moving onto kindergarten. The Chehalis Canoe Family was invited to sing coastal Salish songs honoring the youth.

The evening’s MCs were Lucy Hill, parent of a graduate and Policy Council Chairperson, and Philip Youckton, Policy Council Representative.

One of the guest speakers for the evening was Chehalis Tribe Chairman Harry Pickernell Sr. He gave a short speech and congratulated students and their families for completing the first step of their academic lives. He also thanked staff for being so dedicated to teaching our young ones. Families were pleased to hear from Oakville School District Superintendent Rich Staley and Rochester Primary School Principal Amy Roney, who both gave inspiring speeches to the graduating class about their upcoming educational journey.

Special recognition awards were handed out to dedicated individuals who contributed to the success of the 2017-18 school year. Wendy Vasquez was recognized for most volunteer hours for the program year. Wendy put in more than 200 hours of time. Community Resource Officer Jake Dickerson received a thunderous applause when his name was announced. He was given a signed poster from Early Learning staff and graduating children that recognized and thanked him for being a positive role model and for his huge contribution to the program.

After diplomas were handed out, it was a wonderful moment of accomplishment as children stood up together and turned their tassels from the left to the right. This signified they are now taking their next step to kindergarten. They were congratulated with a roaring applause. Families were given time to capture the memories with photos.

After the blessing, elders were invited to dish up their meals. It was a huge feast fit for the occasion. A big thank you goes to Nicole Music-Olney for all of the hard work she put forth toward the slide show.

Good luck to the graduates in the future. Many staff members agreed their smiles will be missed!
Dads and their children gathered June 15 at the Chehalis Tribal Fisheries Department to cast their lines during Fatherhood Fishing Day. The annual gathering is hosted by the Chehalis Tribal Early Learning Program, which provides families the opportunity to celebrate Father’s Day with a fun day of fishing.

It is a great opportunity for dads, uncles and grandpas to pass on cultural traditions and the art of fishing. Families have the chance to strengthen bonds and father figures share knowledge and guidance. Children are taught to snag, battle and hopefully land fish.

The day was filled with action and also provided a delicious treat for the dinner table with a little added gratitude in knowing the effort put into the meal. It’s not just about catching fish, rather it’s more about having fun and learning time-honored cultural traditions.

In addition to supplying fishing gear, Fisheries staff also stocked the pond and prepared the fishing site to ensure accessibility for everyone. Early Learning staff made the day complete by providing a barbecue meal for all participants.
AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

WAYNE BARR
MERLE BENDA
THOMAS BLACKETER
ALVIN BOYD
DOUGLAS BOYD
HENRIETTA BOYD
SYLVANNA BRACERO
SIPRIANNA BRACERO-ROSEBAUGH
JORDAN BRAY
ADRIAN BROWN
MIKE BROWN
LON BURGESS
JENEE BURNETT
RYAN BURNETT
JOHNNY BUMGARNER
ALLEN BUSH
MARK COLSON
KAIDEN DELGADO
KYLE FANNING
RON FANNING
OSTYNN FARRIER
ELIZABETH FULTON
KAYLEEN FULTON
SHAYLEEN FULTON
PAUL GIBSON
BRADLEY GITCHELL
JAMES GUNNELS
WILLIAM HECK
ADRIAN HJELM-SNELL
FAITH HOHEISEL
JORDAN HOWE
AMANDA JENNINGS
JOVONNI JIMENEZ

SANCHEZ
ANTHONY JOE
ONYAH MCCROY
AMIYAH MCELVIAN
ANDREA MCGOUGH
KLY MEAS
MANNY MEDINA
L’REE MHINHORNE
SARAH MYER
MAKYA ORTIVEZ-HICKS

SALLY PIKUTARK
Happy birthday. “May your day be blessed!” from your friends and family.

KYLE and RON FANNING: Happy birthday to my sons. We love you, Mom and Dad!

AMANDA JENNINGS: Happy birthday, love your friends and family.

LATAYA TANNER: Happy birthday from Gramma, Papa and family.

JOHNNY BUMGARNER: Happy birthday, love Marla, Falisty and Carolann.

SANCHEZ
ANTHONY JOE
ONYAH MCCROY
AMIYAH MCELVIAN
ANDREA MCGOUGH
KLY MEAS
MANNY MEDINA
L’REE MHINHORNE
SARAH MYER
MAKYA ORTIVEZ-HICKS

VICTORIA PARENT
HAKAN PHILLIPS
GERALD PICKERNELL III
NATALIE PICKERNELL
SALLY PICKUTARK
MILA ROGERS
WILFREDO ROSADO
JOSEPH SANCHEZ
LEO SANCHEZ
MONICA SANCHEZ

CONGRATS COLLEGE GRADS!

RIKKI SUTTERLICT AND JORDAN HUTCHINSON: We are so proud of you both. Love family and friends.
‘One fence, one family, one dog at a time’ ~ FENCES FOR FIDO

Program enhances life for pooches by creating room to roam

By Brennan Stoelb, Animal Control

It took a year of planning for the dream to become a reality.

In late 2016, I reached out to Fences for Fido to discuss a way to collaborate. At that time, they were not doing much in the South Sound region.

Fast forward to a new year when I talked with Becky Reavis, who was the coordinator for the newly formed Fences For Fido Southwest Regional Chapter. The conversation led to a dream come true for two lucky pets.

Around the time I reconnected with Fences For Fido, I spoke with a resident who lives on Sickman Loop. The resident had also reached out to Fences For Fido so the timing was perfect. In April, organization came out to assess the property and set June 3 as the date of the build. Fences For Fido mentioned that two fences were just as easy as building one, so by the following week, two dogs were getting fences!

Fences for Fido is a nonprofit organization that donates about 100 feet of fencing. The fencing is intended for dogs living on chains or in small enclosures.

Each fence and doghouse they provide costs about $1,000 in materials; labor is volunteer-based. Fences For Fido is funded through donations and grants. They have specific criteria for fences that they donate. It is not for pet owners who simply want a fence.

At 10 a.m. June 3, construction of the fence for local dog Tank began. The Fences for Fido program brought a group of volunteers. Sgt. Jake Dickerson, Jackie Dickerson, Crime Victims Advocate Holli Gomes and I were also ready to get our hands dirty.

After a busy morning, volunteers worked up an appetite and enjoyed a light meal to re-energize for the afternoon project at the next residence. The crew moved to another residence on Sickman Loop to assemble a fence for Griffin.

After completing each structure, the dogs were introduced to their new homes. It was great to witness the dogs zoom everywhere as they enjoyed newfound freedom.

It was a fun day! The work was tedious at times, but lighthearted jokes and laughter were shared while assembling the fences. All of the volunteers understood that their hard work was bringing joy to the families and their beloved pets.

Congratulations to Tank and Griffin. We know you will enjoy your new homes! Thank you to all of the volunteers and pet owners who participated in the Fences For Fido Program.

I am trained as the coordinator for Fences for Fido Chehalis Tribal Builds, and we hope to continue to collaborate with Fences for Fido in the future. In addition to the organization’s criteria, dogs are required to be up to date on vaccinations and spayed or neutered.
JOURNEY

From page 1

river resources. Dozens of people gathered to give blessings and support the Chehalis Canoe Family as it prepared to start the first leg of the Paddle to Puyallup the following day, July 11.

After an opening prayer by Dan “Bones” Gleason and song by Theresa Youckton, Chairman Harry Pickernell and fellow Business Committee members welcomed everyone who came out to show support at the ceremonial send-off and blessing of the canoe.

Representatives from Percy’s family, including his children and grandchildren, stood up and expressed how significant it is to have the Canoe Family choose to leave from a part of the river that has deep meaning to the family.

Percy’s son John Youckton shared memories of when he went on the Canoe Journey 10 years ago. He said he has looked forward to the day when the tribe would begin the sacred voyage from the Chehalis Reservation.

“It’s an honor. I’m glad to see this happen. I was always hoping that our canoe family could leave from our land,” John said.

Established to revitalize and teach Native American way of life before settlers colonized the land, the Canoe Journey is a tradition that dates back to 1989. It has many different meanings and serves as a spiritual cleanse, time of prayer, an opportunity to pay tribute to native ancestors, medicine for healing and much more.

For the first time, the Chehalis Canoe Family is departing from the reservation and completing the entire journey from the banks of the Chehalis River to the final landing site in Puyallup on July 28. The group will travel hundreds of miles braving the currents through the Pacific Ocean and Puget Sound, which are their ancestor’s original highways. Plenty of adventures are ahead.

An event of this magnitude requires a tremendous amount of preparation. The Chehalis Canoe Family and many volunteers put in hours of work prior to the departure. To cover some expenses and coordinate logistics, fundraisers and meetings were held for months leading up to the moment they left their homelands.