The Clocktower Project

It is fitting that the Centralia College clocktower — at the center of the campus and the figurative heart of our community — was chosen as the point upon which we focus the celebration of our diversity. The monuments engraved at the base of the tower are dedicated to people who have, by virtue of their giftedness and passion, enriched our society.

Each of these represents an example of personal dedication, unyielding faith, and uncommon courage that have overcome the age-old barriers of intolerance and circumstance. Each, through their uniqueness and singular dedication to purpose, has helped secure the foundation upon which our society stands.

The Clocktower Diversity Project was conceived by the Cultural Infusion Project, and supported by the Diversity Committee and Associated Students of Centralia College. It was commemorated in 1997, when the first eight individuals were honored. In 2000, the diversity tradition was continued by the selection of three more honorees for recognition.

In 2002, two more monuments were added. The first honors one of the original native Northwest cultures for its uncommon character and determination. The other honors the visionary Japanese-American artist and sculptor George Tsutakawa.

The Honorees

GEORGE AND MARY WASHINGTON (1817-1905) (Unknown-1889)
African-American Pioneers
Founder of what would become known as Centralia, George—the orphaned son of a slave—platted the land and sold plots for $10. Mary named the streets. Washington used his wit, good humor, and hard work to earn the acceptance and respect of the people despite the violence and racial hatred that marked much of Civil War-era America. The couple was widely known for their friendliness and generosity.

MOTHER JOSEPH (1823-1902)
Educator
Born Esther Pariseau in French Canada, the frontier educator devoted her life to the efforts of the Sisters of Providence to provide health care and education. Mother Joseph helped establish 11 hospitals, seven academies, five Indian schools, and two orphanages. Many of the institutions she designed and helped build were in Washington, most around Vancouver. One of the largest, Providence Academy, still stands within view of the Columbia River.

HAZEL PETE (1914 – )
Basketmaker/Tribal Elder
An active member and distinguished cultural leader of the Chehalis tribe, Hazel Pete is a master basketmaker who has been a major influence in preserving tribal culture and tradition. Her patterns have been passed on to new generations of tribal members so this unique Native American art form may continue and flourish. She continues to teach, support, and maintain tribal traditions and culture.

DIXY LEE RAY (1914 – 1994)
Scientist and Governor
A marine biologist and educator, Dr. Ray was deeply involved in a variety of environmental issues. She directed the Pacific Science Center in Seattle and the graduate research program at the University of Washington for 25 years. In 1972 she was appointed chairperson of the Atomic Energy Commission. After serving as Assistant Secretary of State under Richard Nixon, Ray in 1977 became the first woman to be elected Governor of Washington.

MERCE CUNNINGHAM (1919-2009)
Dancer/Choreographer
A native of Centralia, Cunningham is recognized as one of America’s most influential choreographers. Formerly the principal soloist for the Martha Graham dance company, Cunningham formed his own company in 1953. He has choreographed more than 150 works and is known for the innovative use of chance processes and contemporary technology in his work.

BILLY FRANK JR. (1931 - )
Native American Activist
Billy Frank Jr. has been at the forefront of efforts to insure fishing rights and other treaty guarantees for Northwest Native Americans for decades. A former Nisqually tribal fishery manager, Frank is the chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission. He has won the Albert Schweitzer Award for Humanitarianism, the American Indian Distinguished Service Award, the National Common Cause Award, and the Washington State Environmental Excellence Award.
Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney
State Representative and Community Activist
Phyllis, the daughter of Hispanic immigrants, grew up immersed in the plight of migrant workers. After moving to Seattle, she successfully ran for a position in the state House of Representatives and began a long tenure representing the people of the 46th Legislative District. She continues to work tirelessly to help minorities achieve success and has dedicated her life to public service, advocating for education and the rights of individuals on a regional and national stage.

JIMI HENDRIX (1942 – 1970)
Musician
Jimi Hendrix was one of the most influential guitarists in the era of modern music. He expanded the range and vocabulary of the electric guitar into areas no musician had before explored. His blend of rock, blues, and jazz created a sound that had not before been heard and is now a standard in contemporary music. The Seattle-born Hendrix was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1992.

FLOYD SCHMOE (1895 – 2001)
Humanitarian/Naturalist
Schmoe, a Mt. Rainier Park naturalist, taught at the University of Washington and wrote on nature and humanitarianism.

A Quaker, conscientious objector and peace activist, he rescued battlefield wounded in Europe during WWI, helped Jews flee Nazi Germany, fought for freedom for Japanese-Americans in “relocation” camps, and helped build homes for survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bomb blasts. He was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize and earned Japan’s Order of the Sacred Treasure, the nation’s highest civilian award.

THE COWLITZ PEOPLE
Ancient people of Southwest Washington
The four tribes of the Cowlitz nation have lived in the southwest interior of what is now the state of Washington for millennia. The aboriginal territory encompassed about 2.4 million acres. The Cowlitz were a powerful and independent people, yet friendly and cooperative to European traders and settlers.
The Cowlitz steadfastly refused to cede their lands to the U.S. government during treaty negotiations begun in about 1852, but essentially lost their home after the Indian wars that followed.

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JUAN PEREZ (unknown – 1775)
Northwest Explorer
Perez was a Spanish commander who led the first naval expedition from Mexico to the Pacific Northwest in 1774. He became the first non-native explorer of the region that would become Washington State. His explorations allowed Spain to claim the area until 1819, when it ceded its interests to the United States. Perez and his Spanish-Mexican crew constructed the territory’s first non-native buildings at Neah Bay. Spanish explorers who followed him brought fruits, vegetables, and domestic animals to the Northwest.

ELMER SMITH (1888 – 1932)
Legal Advocate
Smith was a labor attorney who defended the eight International Workers of the World union members charged and convicted of murdering several World War I veterans during an emotional and violent Veteran’s Day parade in 1919 Centralia. Smith worked until his death to free the IWW members, or “Wobblies,” as they were called at the time. All eight were subsequently pardoned. Smith worked throughout his career for minimum wage laws, consumer protection, and the rights of free speech and assembly.

Tomas Villanueva
Farm Labor Organizer and Civil Rights Pioneer
Founder and past president of the United Farm Workers of Washington, Tomas emigrated from Mexico with his family at age 14. After college, Tomas began to work for equality for minority workers. He established the Pacific Northwest’s first privately funded Farm Worker Cooperative, Community Service Center and the first Farm Workers Medical Clinic. His advocacy led to the first collective bargaining contract in agriculture and coverage of farm workers under state labor laws. He continues to work for labor benefits, equal educational opportunities for first-generation Americans, and social equality.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA (1910 – 1997)
Artist/Sculptor
A noted Nisei artist, Tsutakawa explored man’s need for a harmonious relationship with nature. He served in the U.S. Army during WWII while his family was interned.
Tsutakawa was known for his wooden obos, bronze sculptures, as well as sumi ink paintings and prints. Many authorities believe his greatest contribution to art came in his fountains described the effort to unify water——“the life force of the universe that flows in an elusive cyclical course throughout eternity”——with immutable metal sculptures.

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