

Project Story: Unveiling event for the sign of the Squamish name of Bowen Island

Pauline le Bel



For thousands of years, the Skwxwú7mesh People called this island Nexwlélexwm. To restore this important part of our history and to foster healthy relationships with Squamish Nation, we built a sign, which greets one as you get off the ferry. On June 21, the sign was blessed by the Skwxwú7mesh Canoe Family. The sign maker, Coral Louie, was honoured and separated from the sign, which now belongs to the community. Many thanks to the Neighbourhood Small Grants Committee for their support. In keeping with Coast Salish tradition, I invited three witnesses, who attended the ceremony, to speak from the heart about what they observed and learned at the ceremony.

Chris Corrigan: The role of a witness is an important one, and as such is given a prominent position in Squamish protocol and ceremony. We were asked and gifted to do this work. We are the ones tasked with carrying the story of what happened and have the responsibility to share what we saw with any who ask us.

A moment that stood out to me was when Sempulyan referred to us in Skwxwú7mesh sníchim as "Nexwlélexwm Úxwumixw" which means "The villagers of Nexwlélexwm." At that moment, I began to feel that we were beginning to take our place as people who were cognizant of and deeply embedded in this territory where we live and the relationship we have with the host nation. This is a foundation that Bucky said we can build upon. I look forward to building on it right away.

Rob Gloor: I am honoured to have been a witness to the Nexwlélexwm Sign Blessing Ceremony. As a witness, I found the ceremony to be emotionally stirring, carrying both the weight of colonialism and a sense of hope for the future. As a settler, it was very beneficial to my own understanding of our island's indigenous history and our path forward in reconciliation. In the end, the ceremony was an affirming experience which helped to strengthen my commitment to the ongoing responsibility I carry as part of a larger community.

Gary Ander, Mayor Bowen Island: I was honoured to be a witness at the very significant naming ceremony. I feel that the welcoming signage now represents the connection with our host nation, the Squamish peoples. It will be a reminder to all who come to our beautiful island, both residents and visitors alike, that we cherish our heritage and recognize that we have a responsibility to carry on the legacy of care and appreciating our natural environment as the First Nations did for many thousands of years before us. Thank-you Pauline for the drive to get this done and thank-you to the Bowen Island Community Foundation for help with this momentous project.

