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A legislative voice for historic preservation Inside the Washington State Heritage Caucus

By Todd Matthews, Editor

When the 2010 legislative session begins Monday, lawmakers and lobbyists will fill the State Capitol Campus in Olympia. One group that will have its own presence is historic preservationists, thanks to an organization known as the Washington State Heritage Caucus.

The Heritage Caucus was created 20 years ago for people to learn more about how pending legislation and current initiatives might impact the state's cultural, heritage, and arts resources and organizations. Today, the Heritage Caucus has bipartisan co-chairs -- Sen. Jim Honeyford (R), 15th District, and Rep. Lynn Kessler (D), 24th District -- and is staffed by Lauren Danner of the Washington State Historical Society (WSHS) and Mark Gerth of the Washington State Arts Commission. WSHS Director David L. Nicandri is a co-founder and remains a major figure in the Heritage Caucus today.

When the Legislature is in session, caucus members meet every Wednesday morning in the Cherberg Building. What started with eight members in 1990 has grown to as many as 70 people.

"The forum dynamic is the reason for having the caucus," says Nicandri. "To bring people together to share information. It creates a premier networking opportunity for people active in the field. That's the principle value in my estimation."

He also notes that having legislators as co-chairs and holding meetings on legislative time is "the straw that serves the drink. Just having stakeholders getting together doesn't cut it."

Proponents of successful preservation efforts such as the Heritage Barn Register and Preservation Initiative and the Heritage Capital Projects Fund had face time with the Heritage Caucus.

The *Index* recently spoke with Nicandri to learn more about the Heritage Caucus.

TACOMA DAILY INDEX: As I understand it, you co-founded the Heritage Caucus. Is that correct?

DAVID NICANDRI: I guess I could say I helped mediate its birth. During the State's Centennial, which concluded in 1989, there was a sub-committee called the Constituencies Committee. It was all the people

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(PHOTO COURTESY WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 kind of in the orbit of the centennial -- more of a stakeholders group. They would meet during the legislative session to talk about things related to state heritage. The meetings were held in the dining room of the Lord Mansion, also known as the Washington State Capital Museum, about seven blocks south of the Capital. Rarely, but every once in a while, a legislator would attend. One legislator attended with some regularity and his name was Max Vekich.

The Centennial Commission had an end date. Max was the one who actually got the idea [for the Heritage Caucus]. During a conversation with me, and drawing on his legislative experience, he said, "Why don't we create a caucus in the Legislature around heritage and history?" Max and I met in his office and we decided to call it the Heritage Caucus.

The first meetings during the 1990 legislative session were held in a very small conference room in the John L. O'Brien Building.

The two key insights Max had were to have the Heritage Caucus chaired by a legislator and [the Heritage Caucus] meets on legislative time or is conducive to legislative involvement. That's why I don't want to say I founded it. The critical ideas were actually Max's ideas. He was the one that was bringing the added value through his willingness to chair it, his suggestion of changing the name, and meeting where it was convenient for other legislators to get to if they are inclined to do so.

We started meeting during the legislative sessions very early in the morning in one of the legislative buildings. For the first 10 years of the Heritage Caucus, we met on the House side. Starting in 2001 and 2002, we started meeting on the Senate side, which is where we meet now.

So I think of Max Vekich as really the founder of it. I was merely the instrument and did the early staff work. To this day, staff from my organization do a lot of the work to keep the caucus going. That is the early history of it.

INDEX: What does the Heritage Caucus do?

NICANDRI: It's a forum. It's not an agency. It's merely a forum for the vetting of ideas and policy ramifications associated with the nexus of issues surrounding heritage activity.

INDEX: Can you take me through the process of what happens during the Legislative session as it relates to the Heritage Caucus?

NICANDRI: There are inevitably pieces of legislation that are introduced that interface with or have some tangent with one of the policy aspects that affect heritage activity statewide. Sometimes something will come up of such critical importance that there is what I would call a 'mobilization effect' where one or both co-chairs will say, "We'll call someone or get hold of someone." But mostly it's just simply a free forum of information. The meetings have a well-established format. Everyone introduces themselves. There's a run-down of all then-current pieces of legislation that are at various stages procedurally. Lastly, there is just kind of a program -- someone or some group will make presentations about what they do that are typically just kind of familiarizations. The meetings are one hour. They start at 7:00 a.m. and they end at 8:00 a.m. And they almost all follow that script.

INDEX: What are some examples in recent

years where the Heritage Caucus was involved in what you describe as a 'mobilizing effect'?

NICANDRI: The Heritage Caucus was involved in legislation that created the Heritage Capital Projects. That was Rep. Ken Jacobsen's particular cause. He kept verbalizing this at Heritage Caucus meetings. Finally, I guess, he spoke about it with such regularity that I just proposed our agency request legislation -- that was about 1997 or 1998 -- to create a process whereby heritage projects by non-state-governmental agencies could receive state capital budget financing. It was introduced in both chambers. I'm sure Jacobsen was the prime sponsor in the House. But still, if you were to measure influence by dollar volume -- which is not necessarily the full criteria to evaluate things -- but if you were, the \$10 million a biennium that goes to heritage capital projects is probably the single most consequential outcome from the Heritage Caucus in terms of rou-

tine biennium to biennium influence on the heritage scene throughout the state.

The first meeting of the Heritage Caucus will be held Weds., Jan. 13, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. in Olympia on the Capital Campus, Cherberg Building, Conference Room A-B-C. Staff from the Office of Financial Management will be presenting on the state budget.

In addition, legislative training will be offered Weds., Jan. 20, at 8:00 a.m. immediately following the Caucus meeting. The training will be held in the Cherberg Building, Room 211. The training is free and is a comprehensive overview of the legislative process. If you would like to attend, e-mail Lauren Danner at ldanner@wshs.wa.gov.

For more information about the Heritage Caucus, visit arts.wa.gov/projects/heritage-caucus.shtml.

Salmon recovery projects awarded \$3.4M

Pierce County salmon recovery projects were recently awarded more than \$3.4 million from the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board to protect and restore habitat.

Funded projects include protecting high quality shoreline habitat, levee setbacks, noxious weed removal, and stream and buffer restoration.

"These new funds provide significant funding for local, on-the-ground salmon restoration projects that help create jobs while also restoring and protecting the environment," said Dan Wrye, water quality manager for Pierce County Public Works and Utilities. "While these projects are intended for salmon recovery, they also help improve flood protection and water quality."

Project sponsors include the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group, the cities of Orting and Sumner, the Pierce Conservation District, the Pierce County Noxious Weed Control Board, the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Cascade Land Conservancy, and the Key Peninsula Metropolitan Park District. Project sponsors will contribute an additional \$4 million in matching funds.

Local panels of scientists and community members rigorously reviewed each project. The prioritized projects were forwarded to the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board for review and selection. Local projects compete with proposals from across the state to identify the most effective and scientifically sound projects.

The five-member Salmon Recovery Funding Board, created by the Legislature in 1999, provides grant funds to protect or restore salmon habitat and related activities. It works closely with local watershed-based groups known as lead entities. The Board has helped finance over 900 projects statewide.

Here is a brief summary of the projects by watershed:

Puyallup/White

-- The Clearwater River habitat restoration project received \$425,000 to install large woody debris to create more salmon habitat and improve flood protection;

-- The Calistoga Setback levee project received \$540,000 for property acquisition and design of a setback levee on the Puyallup River in the City of Orting;

-- The White River setback levee project received \$200,000 for a feasibility study and pre-



liminary design for a levee setback in the City of Sumner;

-- The South Prairie Creek knotweed project received \$161,500 to control highly invasive knotweed in the South Prairie Creek basin.

Nisqually

-- The Mashel River project received \$1.16 million for protection and restoration of salmon habitat on the Mashel River near Eatonville;

-- The Nisqually River project to control knotweed received \$133,000;

-- The Ohop Creek project received \$97,550 to design restoration of one mile of floodplain near the confluence of Ohop Creek and the Nisqually River.

Key Peninsula/Gig Harbor/Islands

-- The Devil's Head acquisition project received \$500,000 for acquisition of high-quality marine shoreline habitat and uplands at the southern end of Key Peninsula;

-- The Dutcher Cove project received \$238,046 for acquisition and restoration of high-quality marine shoreline and uplands in Dutcher Cove.

More information is available at piercescounty-wa.gov/srfb.