

## LOCAL NEWS

## Ceremony memorializes reburial of indigenous people's remains at Cal State Long Beach



In advance of California Native American Day, California State University Long Beach held an event to officially recognize the reburial of remains and various artifacts in an area on the campus. CSULB is one of the first institutions to complete a reburial on a university campus under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The celebration included speeches and traditional Native American songs. Long Beach September 22, 2016. Photo by Brittany Murray, Press Telegram/SCNG

Gathering-songs of the Chumash people, sung to the rhythm of a rattling gourd, filled the air Thursday morning at the opening of a ceremony commemorating the reburial of human remains and artifacts belonging to the indigenous Tongva people who inhabited the lands now developed as Cal State Long Beach and surrounding shopping centers and neighborhoods.

“It’s good to hear the songs of the indigenous people of this land, the place we call Cal State Puvungna, known affectionately as ‘The Beach,’ ” said Craig Stone, director of the American Indian Studies program at the campus officially called Cal State Long Beach.

### **Honoring the past**

The Tongva people, who would also become known as Gabrielinos in the years following the Spanish colonization of California, gave their village the name Puvungna, which would become modern Long Beach. The village was significant to the traditional beliefs of indigenous Californians and regarded as the site where the divine figure of Chungichnish provided instructions to native peoples, according to [information posted on a Cal State Long Beach website](#).

Thursday’s ceremony took place near the eastern edge of the Long Beach campus, near its International House building. The commemorative event followed the reburial of the human remains and artifacts that took place in mid-July. A small mound marks the location of the reburial site itself, and a small grouping of rocks nearby includes a stone engraved with the name and a short description of the historic village.

### **‘A lot happened here’**

Cindy Alvitre, an American Indian studies lecturer who is also of Tongva heritage, said that to followers of indigenous religions Puvungna’s significance was comparable to that of cities like Mecca, Jerusalem or Bethlehem.

“A lot happened here in the creation narratives, and obviously the land changed with the Spanish colonization” she said

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Things changed again after World War II. The campus, initially known as Los Angeles-Orange County State College, opened in 1949 and the surrounding area was swept up in the rush of postwar development. Construction projects resulted in the discovery of Tongva remains. Alvitre said the people of Puvungna had likely set aside land for the cemetery in an area near where modern-day Bellflower Boulevard meets the 405 Freeway.

Researchers initially believed they had found the remains of 21 people but more recent examinations have shown that the remains of nearly 100 Tongva people had been discovered.

“They included grandmothers and grandfathers, and aunties and uncles,” Alvitre said during the ceremony.

“We will continue to right the historic wrongs,” she said.

## **Setting precedent**

Researchers eventually abandoned their early studies of the human remains found near Cal State Long Beach. This resulted in the remains being essentially kept as skeletons in the closet for decades, Alvitre said.

The first Cal State Long Beach president to support efforts to repatriate and rebury the Tongva people's remains was Steve Horn, who reached that decision in 1978, Stone said during Thursday morning's ceremony. He said in an interview after the commemoration event that a series of bureaucratic issues created continual challenges. Federal requirements became a factor following the 1990 enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

“You have to go through all these processes of approval,” Stone said.

All that work came to fruition this year, and campus president Jane Close Conoley said two years' worth of work were required to properly prepare remains and artifacts for reburial.

A common opinion expressed by people attending Thursday's event was that efforts to rebury human remains at Cal State Long Beach would be the beginning of a trend across the country, and even around the world, where human remains that have been taken from historic grave sites would be reinterred.

“These ancestors have waited a long time to be returned to the earth,” said Louis

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“Word has spread of what has occurred here and it’s given them hope,” Robles Jr. said.

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