

# CEREMONIAL BOWL NETS \$10,000

Bill Cleverley.

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## **Saltspring seller convinced to take low bid from First Nations bidders**

An ancient native ceremonial bowl dug up 30 years ago on Saltspring Island sold for \$10,000 at auction in Vancouver Saturday.

An alliance of First Nations Sencoten peoples representing the Semiahoo, Tsartlip, Tsawout and Pauquachin peoples, taking in territory covering White Rock, Surrey, Saanich and Saltspring Island, has bought the artifact.

The bowl, sold by West Coast Estates Auction, is believed to be sacred to the Sencoten. "Right now it needs to come home to the Sencoten elders," Sencoten councillor Joanne Charles said after making the purchase.

"We'll be talking with the group. I know it needs to be washed and cleansed and taken care of through ceremony. We'll be making a decision for it at that time.

"I will be contacting the elders from within the communities and some of our spiritual advisers in the communities that will do the work. I can't tell you what that will be. We just needed to secure it first."

More than 30 years ago, Saltspring resident Ken Stevens found the

bowl while working for the Ministry of Transportation, clearing topsoil at a gravel pit on Crown land near an inland shell midden on the west side of Fulford Harbour.

Stevens brought the bowl home, but he must have shown it to an archeologist, because it is documented in 1971.

The Fulford Harbour bowl weighs

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10.2 kilograms and is the largest of 12 stone bowls found in the Gulf Islands. Two-thirds of the figure is a massive domed head with large concentric eyes, spanning the width of the face.

In 2004, Stevens met Ted Pappas, owner of West Coast Estates Auction, at an antique roadshow. Stevens had brought the bowl to discover its worth.

Pappas explained that its spiritual value far outweighed its monetary value. He suggested Stevens donate the bowl to the First Nations but Stevens could not afford to do so.

The sale created some controversy, especially among the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, which maintained First Nations people should not have to buy

back their cultural property.

Charles said the bowl came to her peoples' attention when a picture of it was carried in the Peace Arch News following the roadshow.

Pappas said there was considerable interest in the bowl, including from a member of the board of the Smithsonian Institution who lives in Victoria and was prepared to bid as high as \$15,000 for it. Pappas said the man was talked into letting it go to the Sencoten.

There was some excitement when members of the Hul'qumi'num band showed up at the auction house Saturday with members of the Vancouver police.

"We were told by the officers they were here to investigate a stolen article, which I am afraid wasn't exactly the case," said Pappas. "The police officers took notes and all the correspondence we had with the people who were suggesting that the bowl was stolen, and they said: 'Carry on.'"

Pappas said he's glad the bowl is finding a First Nations home. "It's a great relief because it's been with me every day full time for the last two weeks."

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