

## Rare stone bowl back with Sto:lo

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British Columbia's Lieutenant Governor Steven Point of Chilliwack is praising a North Vancouver man after he volunteered to return a long-lost artifact to the Sto:lo First Nation.

Jeff Harris, who runs a native art and artifact auction, gave the carved stone bowl back to the nation in a small ceremony at the end of May.

Harris had come across the artifact 15 years ago, when a man brought it into the auction house along with a number of other items. Being stone, the bowl stood out, as the vast majority of the province's aboriginal artifacts are made of wood, bone or some other organic material.

The man explained that he had inherited the bowl from his grandfather, who had dug it up on the family farm in Harrison Mills more than 50 years before.

It struck Harris that the unusual object was unlikely to have been a trade good; it had probably simply been lost. For that reason, he felt it shouldn't be put on the dock with other artifacts, so he bought it from the man, instead.

Harris kept the bowl for 15 years, unsure what to do with it, until last month, when an opportunity presented itself to pass it on to its rightful owners. While attending a piano recital in Richmond, he got to talking with the man sitting next to him. It turned out the stranger was Point's chauffeur.

It struck Harris that Point, who is himself a member of the Sto:lo nation (on whose traditional lands the bowl had been found) might be interested in the artifact's return. The driver ran the idea by his employer, and a few days later stopped by to pick the bowl up and take it to Point.

The lieutenant-governor consulted with officials at the Royal BC Museum in Victoria, who told him the find was not insignificant. Because carbon dating doesn't work on inorganic materials, it is difficult to put an age on the bowl, but the artifact could conceivably be thousands of years old. It was likely used in the preparation of medicines.

Point got in touch with Harris, telling him he would be thrilled to see the bowl returned to the nation.

A short time later, Harris met with a chief and other representatives of the Skawahlook Nation at the Terminal City Club in Vancouver. There he officially handed the bowl over.

"They were just so happy," said Point. "They were very, very pleased with this, and they thanked him profusely. It was a very nice evening."

"At the end (Point) recited a prayer and his wife gave thanks," said Harris. "We all held hands in a circle around the bowl. There was so much energy in the room. It was surprising."

The nation will be putting the bowl on display for educational purposes, said Point.

"When any First Nation can get some of their artifacts returned, it's a great thing," he said.

To Harris, it was just the right thing to do.

"It's kind of like finding a wallet or keys or something," he said. "You just have to give it back."