

# Indian council ‘heals’ waters of Portsmouth brook



Seeker of Owl Wisdom (far right), a member of the Aquidneck Indian Council, reenacts the Healing of the Water ceremony by pouring a small bottle of water into Founder’s Brook on Saturday. 3 Horses, the council’s chairman (second from right) looks on with other members of the group. Photography is discouraged during the actual ceremonies. “This is our church,” 3 Horses explained. *Photo by Jim McGaw.*

PORTSMOUTH — The waters at Founder’s Brook were “purified” Saturday in a sacred Native American ceremony attended by about 30 members of the [Aquidneck Indian Council](#).

No photography was allowed during the actual ceremonies. “This is our church,” 3 Horses explained.

## **Smudging:**

It began with a “[smudging](#)” ceremony, led by another council member, Seeker of Owl Wisdom. Sacred herbs such as white sage, cedar and tobacco were burned, giving off a smoke that’s used to chase evil or unwanted spirits away from an individual, said 3 Horses.

Using turkey or hawk feathers, Seeker of Owl Wisdom fanned the smoke at different parts of a person’s body, front and back. “You start at the heart; that is what you cleanse first,” said 3 Horses. “Then you go from the head down to your toes.”

## **Healing of the Water Ceremony:**

After gathering in a circle, one by one each member took a small container of water and offered a prayer before pouring it into the babbling brook. Then they walked clockwise around the circle and returned to their spot before another member did the same. During the lengthy process, members chanted “honoring” songs while herbs burned in the middle of the circle.

“Creator, we ask you to guide us on the right path, look down on us and smile on us. The sacred fire is lit for you,” said Don Sly, the chairman of the nonprofit group whose native name is 3 Horses. “There are members of our council who are in dire need or healing.”

The **Chippewa** ritual, explained 3 Horses, “purifies” the water so that it’s clean for drinking, as well as for fish and local crops.

“We’re going to take fresh, clean water that’s been blessed. You’re pouring your prayers into the water and it will mix with everyone else’s prayers,” he said. “The prayers do not stop there. The idea is that the prayers continue to flow wherever they go.”

It was the third year that the nonprofit group held the “Healing of the Water” ceremony at the site where the town was founded more than 376 years ago. Saturday’s event also featured a naming ceremony, during which four members of the council received their tribal names, and a pipe ceremony.



3 Horses (Don Sly), chairman of the Aquidneck Indian Council, stands near Founder’s Brook.

### **Naming ceremony:**

After the Healing of the Water ceremony came the naming ceremony, in which several members were bestowed tribal names. Beforehand, the members would ask 3 Horses for a name, and he meditated for at least one moon cycle with the Creator guiding him.

“Basically it’s a bond between the person wanting the name, myself and the creator,” said 3 Horses, noting that the name sometimes comes from inspiration or a dream. “They don’t know the names yet; that stays with me until the actual ceremony.”

3 Horses’ name was given to him by another tribal member, Running Deer, after the pair started seeing three sets of horses nearly everywhere they’d go, he said. “Obviously, I was told by the creator that that’s what he wanted me to be named.”

The names can be as short as one word or as long as a complete sentence, he said. As was the case Saturday, sometimes a member is given a choice of two names and can pick their favorite.

On Saturday, a council member named Crystal was given the name Moondancer, Joshua was named Searching Elk and Martha's tribal name was Buffalo Child.

One member was too young to speak but received a new name anyway. Sarah Elizabeth, not even 4 months old, was named Willow Rain Dancer.

In each case, another member of the tribe introduced the person around the circle to everyone, using their new name.



Female members of the Aquidneck Indian Council pose for a photo before the three ceremonies that were conducted at Founder's Brook Memorial Park Saturday. *Photo by Jim McGaw.*

### **Pipe Ceremony:**

The service concluded with a pipe ceremony, in which apple tobacco was stuffed into a Native American pipe, lit and passed around. Everyone said a silent prayer and offered the pipe up to Father (the sky above) and Mother (the earth below) before either taking a puff or simply holding it to their chest.

Although the long ceremony (about 100 minutes) was stately in nature, it was also punctuated by light banter and humor at times. "I need my four-wheel drive sneakers for this one," 3 Horses said at one point as he tried to navigate through a particular soggy patch of the park.

After the ceremony, members were invited back to the Middle Road home of 3 Horses and his wife, Dream of Wolves (aka Barbara Sly), which serves as the council's headquarters. There they enjoyed a potluck lunch and dancing to the music of the Soaring Eagle Singers.

For more information about the Aquidneck Indian Council, visit [www.aquidneckindiancouncil.org](http://www.aquidneckindiancouncil.org). Drum practice is held every Thursday at 6 p.m., and anyone is welcome to join in.