

On Saturday November 18th the sound of native Flutes and Suquamish tribal drums rang out in downtown Seattle next to a traditional dugout canoe. They announced the beginning of the fourth annual Potlatch Fund Gala at the Seattle Grand Hyatt.

Over 460 people attended this sold-out event and their donations raised over \$39,000 for Northwest native causes. It is for this reason that Tim Otani from Washington Mutual called Potlatch Fund “The premiere organization working to promote giving from and to Indian Country in the Northwest”

While these donations are a great start, philanthropy has only just begun in Indian country. In fact, the sad statistic that only half of one percent of donations find their way to Native causes, is the very reason the Potlatch Fund was created four years ago.

The very name, Potlatch Fund calls upon the history of the philanthropic culture of tribes in the Northwest. Potlatches were events where giving was practiced on a scale unmatched in any other part of the world, serving social, political, and spiritual purposes.

As we are in the holiday season it is appropriate to remember that the Thanksgiving holiday itself is a celebration of the time when Native Americans practiced philanthropy by sheltering and feeding the homeless and hungry non-natives which had landed near the Wampanoag village, and then inviting them for a feast at which all the main entrees have now become the staple foods of the holiday.

Now it is the Natives who often find themselves homeless and hungry. Current statistics in native country are staggering. There is no population anywhere in the U.S. with lower life expectancy, higher suicide, addiction, poverty, and list goes on. And with the cutoff of promised government services and less than 5% of tribes having businesses or casinos that can even be called successful, 95% of tribes can do little to lift the reservations up, much less reach out to those lost in the cities.

Yet, for those with the heart and the means to help, this is your time. There is no other U.S. community more in need and, therefore, no other community for which a donation can go as far as in the Native Community. This year at the gala we honored Steve and Tricia Trainer for the donation of a building, services, and funds totaling nearly 2 million dollars to house the Chief Seattle Club for Homeless Native men, women and children in Seattle. Steve and Tricia are not native, but it is that spirit of giving that began traditions like Thanksgiving, and which are true representations of the spirit of the Potlatch.

We encourage you to get involved. Do some research on the statistics. And help us begin to fix the third world in our own backyard. You are invited to join the Potlatch.