

## Q & A WITH CHAD WRIGHT

*TWA members and others are talking to writer Sharon Babcock about enduring inspirations, life lessons, and perspectives from their experiences on the working waterfront.*

*This month is the 11th installment in the series: Chad Wright, CEO of Marine View Ventures.*



“This has always been where I wanted to be,” says Chad Wright, who grew up around a father and a grandfather who were tribal leaders and who served in various roles for the Tribal Council of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. After earning degrees from Boston College, Pepperdine University School of Law, and Stanford University Graduate School of Business, Wright returned to Fife to lead the non-gaming arm of the tribe, Marine View Ventures, Inc., where he currently serves as CEO.

The Puyallup Tribe of Indians is one of the largest Indian tribes in the Pacific Northwest with some 4,500 members. Incorporated by the tribe in 1989, Marine View Ventures increases the tribe’s land asset base and creates jobs and job training opportunities for tribal members. Economically, the enterprise is focused on leveraging its existing assets to generate above-market returns for the tribe and its strategic partners.

Wright quietly tells me that his remarks speak only for himself, not for the entire tribe. His interests in Tacoma’s waterfront are historical, cultural, personal, and economic. “The bay is what defines us as people living around it. The health and well-being of its salmon is of most importance; it is an indicator for the general public as well as the tribe, the barometer of human health. If the health drops severely, I believe we need to rethink the environment we are living in and whether or not we can survive in it.”

### **Q: What is the purpose of Marine View Ventures?**

A: The tribe has for the last 30 years wanted to reacquire its lost reservation land (95% of the original 18,000 acres) and established our organization to oversee that (reacquisition) following the lands claim settlement of 1988. This agreement meant a lot to the development and future of Tacoma’s tideflats and industry and took over seven years to complete. Tribal fishing was a large part of this settlement. The Port of Tacoma was another major party in the agreement; in my view, we were not opposed. Today in addition to land acquisition, our work includes managing non-gaming businesses -- Chinook Landing Marina, Ole and Charlie’s Marinas (currently closed), fuel stations, and convenience stores.

### **Q: Who are your main customers?**

A: I think of them more as partners. We have long-standing tenants in the marina, such as SSA Marine. We provide about 130 jobs in our business ventures.

**Q: Is there collaboration with other tribes in your work?**

A: Yes, tribes from five western states meet regularly to exchange information on tax-related issues, public policy, and topics related to fuel. For example, we observe the conversions of fuel to liquid natural gas in shipping vessels, a fuel much cleaner and one that will improve emissions greatly. One of our region's local non-native businesses, Totem Ocean Trailer Express, is leading the way in this.

**Q: How much growth is possible? Can a sustainable environment and growth both happen?**

A: Economic growth is an opportunity in the region as long as it is managed well. The infrastructure must improve before business can grow because it is now limited by, one, rail that must expand to service the growth and, two, intolerable roads.

**Q: What is a good day for you?**

A: Most fulfilling is when I encounter tribal members in their normal walks of life, both youth and elders out in the community. That is who I serve. In my mind, these people are really family. When I get to see them it makes for a good day.

**Q: What is most challenging?**

A: In the part of our work that focuses on reservation land re-acquisition, the most difficult thing is trying to co-exist. For example, some fishermen on the Puyallup River do not respect the riverbed or that the fish in it come from a tribal hatchery. I grew up in Fife when it was a farming community and when fishing was an industry for the tribe. It is now an industry that does not exist for the tribe because of plummeting salmon runs due to drastically altered habitat. Despite the Boldt decision 40 years ago outlining how fishing resources would be equally shared, that does not influence the priorities or how the average person treats the habitat.

**Q: What surprises people about you?**

A: My Stanford classmates are continually surprised when I tell them I was bred to do this and want to be working right here in Tacoma. They have gone all over the world to work because they can. They are shocked that I am more than satisfied with what I do and where I am.

**Q: What do you see as a future for Commencement Bay?**

A: I wanted to do this work as gaming matures as an industry and will eventually decline. Diversification of resources and assets is critical to the future. To shift focus will take time for the tribe. I want to be here to help shape and grow what we own and manage 20 years from now. For Commencement Bay, I would like to see a body of water in balance with nature as well as a resource for development and for a healthy economy in the South Sound.