

Passing the staff

HILARY WAUKAU, SR.

By Sue Erickson, Staff Writer

Just weeks before his death on August 2nd Hilary (Sparky) Waukau passed on the Environmental Feather Flag, which he had held for the 1994-1995 year as Keeper of the Staff. He passed it to Billy Daniels during the Protect the Earth Rally at the Mole Lake reservation near Crandon, Wis., but it seems he really passed it to all who shared his commitment to Mother Earth.

Few people could be so deserving of the honor to keep the Eagle Staff and few will be able to hold it with the unshakable, uncompromising commitment Sparky had for protecting the Earth and the Indian people.

Sparky was a true warrior. Typically attired in his veterans' cap and beaded vest, Sparky was there when the battles raged. He was there long, loud, and clear during the treaty rights controversy that tore northern Wisconsin apart, the only member of the Wisconsin Counties Association that stood up and insisted that counties must recognize the treaty rights of the Chippewa.



"As long as there is a breath in my body, I'll dedicate my remaining years to protecting my people from the degradation of our environment." Hilary "Sparky" Waukau, Sr. Keeper of the Environmental Protection Staff passes it on during the Protect the Earth gathering at Mole Lake last month. (Photo by Amoose)

He spoke, as always, to the point and without fear. He was a total advocate of tribal sovereignty and a protector of Indian rights.

He was there at the forefront when a nuclear waste dump site was proposed for northern Wisconsin. He fought it with all his heart and power and at every level, recognizing the dire consequences for the Earth and his people should this battle be lost.

In recent years, Sparky declared his new goal-to stop the Exxon mine near Crandon, and once again, he joined the troops to fight for protection of the environment and tribal rights. His failing health did not prevent him from being there-at the forefront, on the scene leading the march. It was his place.

Sparky was there at the annual National Congress of American Indians convention in Denver, Co. last winter. Sparky was there, physically weak but strong in spirit, participating, speaking out on environmental concerns and encouraging NCAI action on environmental issues.

Sparky and NCAI Chairman gaiashkibos led the Grand Entry into the annual powwow at the conference. Sparky carried the Eagle Staff through the Grand Entry and held it during lengthy opening ceremonies. Sparky began to tire and the Staff wavered. Asked if he needed relief, Sparky said "no," and with all of his energy completed the ceremonies to carry the Eagle Staff proudly out once the invocation was completed.

Hilary carried the Staff with determination, conviction, and humility. His grip was firm and tenacious. He was a warrior, an orator, a leader, a friend. He has carried the Staff with grace and courage and now he has passed it on.

Miigwetch Sparky!!!

The Menominee Nation has experienced a tremendous loss with the passing of Hilary "Sparky" Waukau Sr. on August 2, 1995. He died of heart failure at the age of 72. His wife Edith, his children and many grandchildren were with him at Shawano Community Hospital when he passed on. His daughter, Anne Waukau said, "He told us on his deathbed that he wants his children to continue his legacy of helping our people."

Tribal Chairman John Teller said "Sparky will leave a lasting legacy for future generations in regard to service to his people through government as well as on a personal level. His leadership as a staunch advocate for the environment will be greatly missed.

His guidance and wisdom, from the many years of governmental process and decision have proved to be a valuable tool. The tribe will carry on his principal of promoting the preservation of the environment."

Since 1952, he served as tribal vice-chairman, county administrator, reservation judge and other various tribal offices. He was the first chairman of the Menominee County Democratic Party, hold the office from 1959-'64. He remained a member of the Menominee Tribal Legislature until his death.

Waukau worked with seven Wisconsin governors and traveled throughout the United States handling tribal business.

(Excerpted from a Menominee Tribal news release.)