

The Legend of Morris the Moose

By Dave Harris, Seattle District Public Affairs Office

Morris the Moose, adorning a column by the Environmental Resources Section, is shrouded in moostique and symbolic of the people's revolution. You don't get your bearings by column number. You tell people how to navigate the building relative to the Moose.

The party line, just like telling East Coast friends that it rains here every day, conjures up the story that Burke Museum discarded Morris in the 1970s and he was rescued, already stuffed, by former Seattle District archeologist David Munsell. It came in trade for an 8-foot sasquatch, a bison, a dog sled borrowed from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other items Burke loaned for an extravagant holiday display that was "quite lively and fun," says Munsell, who now lives in Santa Fe, N.M. The display garnered attention from the Associated Press, who dispatched the story of the holiday revelry and created a controversy about appropriate use of government time, Munsell recalls, although it was on the up-and-up off duty. ERS mounted Morris as a symbol of the environment among what was then a gaggle of engineers who were, so the story goes, environmentally challenged. Chiefs of Engineering Division resisted its display, the story continues, because Morris looked so out of place. That's the point, the party-line asserts. Environment concerns were out of place among the build-build mindset at the time.

Symbol of the environment, you ask? Cutting the head off a moose depicts compassion toward ecology? Munsell explains that Morris had been around since the 1920s, anyway, and that displaying the head depicts the "dual role of environmentalists," which he described as comprising in life balanced somewhere between "tree-hugging," as he calls it, and the realities of day-to-day choices. Ah, but folklore chimes in, as well: "All I know

about this is the not generally understood fact that when Morris first came to us he had very small antlers—just a couple of palmate lobes barely extending above and a bit beyond his ears," one informant says. "As the seasons and years passed he shed and re-grew his rack many times, in a manner so subtle and gradual that it escaped the notice of all but the most observant or fearful, until finally achieving the magnificence you see today. So it can be truly said: as Morris's legend has grown, so has Morris!"

Mystery solved. Morris lives on, as a maturing, growing sovereign who silently oversees emergent environmental awareness in the district. The informant further speculates, "Perhaps Sellevold and O'Dell (Dick and Phil, former division chiefs) perceived this maturing as emblematic of the accumulation of wisdom and influence that was simultaneously occurring in ERS and so sought to squelch this symbol of our vitality." Morris hung closer to the ground on a door bracket, Munsell says, but he was elevated reluctantly by GSA when so ordered by former commander, Col. Ray Eineigl.

Some employees try to throw curiosity-seekers off by pretending to dismiss the display as lighthearted absurdity, an essential ingredient of comedy.

According to one person, whose name I dare not disclose, "I believe that a big motivator for boldly displaying the moose in the workplace was that it looks funny up there," he said. "I know that isn't very deep or profound, but it says something about the people who displayed it. Having a sense of humor in the work place was important to them. If having a sense of humor is a human attribute, then civil servants should not be afraid to show their human side now and then."

But the living Morris matter is dead serious. When Munsell left the district he took the moose with him, causing the workplace to come unglued. Vic Yoshino, then in ERS and since inexplicably moved to Emergency Management, quietly redeemed Morris from

certain oblivion at a handsome price. Some day, Vic says, he intends to sell Moose Shares.

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