



History lesson: Outside the Salt Museum, Richard Carrier presents an overview of the 90-minute Historic Tram Tour (above and right photos) to the group.

Central New York, and the education aspect of it is remarkable," said Eric Sopchak, senior recreation leader at Onondaga Lake Park, who oversees the program. "You'll be learning something that chances are you may not know."

Using resources from the Parks Department, Sainte Marie and the Liverpool Public Library, Carrier has assembled a compelling soundtrack, with photos, of the area from 1828, when the Oswego Canal was built, to 1915,

when the last of the amusement parks was shuttered. "We provide Richard with documents," Sopchak added. "There is no set script, but there are talking points that Richard hits. However, much of it is rehearsed and lives in his head, so to speak, in terms of what he says and when he says it. Part of our job is to make sure everything he says is fact. We trust him and his historic background but every now and then we'll need to verify or debunk a claim with the Onondaga Historical Association."

The 138-year salt industry plays a starring role in Carrier's script; after all, this is the Salt City. While most everyone is aware of the brine evaporation that took place along Solar Street, the amusement parks and hotels that rimmed the western side of the lake—where Interstate 690 is today—aren't as well-known.

With remarkable photographs and wonderful anecdotes, Carrier informs tram-riders about Pleasant Beach Hotel, Rockaway Beach Hotel, Maple Bay Hotel and the White Lake Amusement Park. He admitted he's lacking in any information about or photographs of the Manhattan Beach Hotel. If anyone out there in *New Times* readerland knows about that mysterious respite, call County Parks at 453-6712.

More interesting photos show ice yachting, eventually discontinued because the chemical-sodden lake stopped freezing over in the winter-time; a Sept. 15, 1912, tornado that ripped apart Long Branch Park, the so-called "granddaddy of the amusement parks"; and Iron Pier, which wasn't iron at all, but which entertained visitors at the southern end of the lake, where Carousel Center stands today.

To continue would be disrespectful of the work Carrier has put into this project, and the tram ride is way more fun anyway. The Historic Tram Tours continue Thursdays through Aug. 12, at 6:30 p.m. Pick up the tram behind the Griffin Visitors Center or next to the Salt Museum. The tour is free, but seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis only.

—MOLLY ENGLISH-BOWERS

History Repeats Itself

History and Syracuse often act like they have never met. While this town boasts a remarkable back story of abolition, Erie Canal-era commerce and amusement parks by the lake, it rarely does, boast, that is. Perhaps it's the rape and pillage of Onondaga Lake until the 1980s that has embarrassed us into silence. County Parks' weekly Historic Tram Tours are a good start at reversing that bad habit.

Led by Richard Carrier, a former employee of the county's de-funded Sainte Marie among the Iroquois (yet another example of our disrespect of history), the tours traverse Onondaga Lake Park every Thursday through Aug. 12. The 90-minute tram down memory lane touches on the glory days of the park, the east side of which was actually the Oswego Canal while the west side sported destination hotels and amusement parks.

"You get to take in the beautiful scenery of the lakefront in urban



Garden spot: Henninger High School is the proud host of a rain garden that presents an eco-friendly face alongside its practical applications.