

Onondaga Historical Association hopes Onondaga Lake film has national reach



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Syracuse, N.Y. -- Onondaga Historical Association leaders hope their first full-length documentary becomes a national hit.

"Beneath the Surface: A Storied History of Onondaga Lake" tracks the history of a small lake that played an outsized role in American history, said Gregg Tripoli, the association's executive director.

"It's a local lake, but it has had a national impact," said Tripoli, who is also the executive producer of the film.

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The 76-minute film details some of those impacts:

- Onondaga Lake is home to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, said to have influenced the U.S. Constitution, our democratic system of government and women's rights.
- Salt production from the lake played a vital role in the building of the Erie Canal and the Union's Civil War victory.
- The **Ecker flying boat**, which took off from the lake in 1911, hangs in the National Air and Space Museum, the most-visited museum of the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C.
- The **\$2 billion cleanup** of the lake, once said to be the country's most polluted, has led to new technologies and models to help clean up other polluted water bodies.

The film's premier was in January, and there will be **a second showing Tuesday** at the Palace Theatre in Syracuse. Tripoli, who has been working on the film for three years, said there will be a few tweaks based on feedback from the January screening.

After Tuesday, Tripoli plans to take the documentary to film festivals. The goal is to get the film in theaters or television around the country.

The film was co-produced with the Syracuse company Otto Media, owned by Bret Moses. The two men, who both grew up in Onondaga County, had worked together on corporate videos and other projects, but hadn't done a full-length film. Four years ago, at a charity event Tripoli was emceeding, Moses pitched the idea of an Onondaga Lake documentary. Tripoli immediately agreed.

"We wanted to tell this story," Tripoli said. "We were in love with it."

Syracuse writer Mark Esichen wrote and directed the film.

Out-of-pocket costs were about \$50,000, Tripoli said. A number of sponsors, including Destiny USA and its owner, Pyramid Companies, put up a total of \$25,000, Tripoli said. Sponsors had no influence on the production, and didn't see the script or the film before the viewing, he said.

The film contains interviews by key players, including Onondaga Nation faithkeeper Oren Lyons, and professors from Syracuse University and Le Moyne College. It also taps into the association's deep archives on the lake, with historical documents and photos of everything from ice yachting to toxic waste spills.

If "Beneath the Surface" is a financial success, Tripoli said, he hopes the historical association can produce more documentaries.

"We're storytellers, and the way to tell those stories is through film," he said. "We have amazing stories here."



Second showing of Onondaga Lake documentary scheduled after initial sellout

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