



HISTORIC SYRACUSE SERIES (/PULP/Slice-of-Life)

Great Law of Peace Center serves to provide clarity for Onondaga Nation



Courtesy of Skä•noñh -Great Law of Peace Center

The Skä•noñh -Great Law of Peace Center gives natives in Onondaga Nation an opportunity to learn about their culture.

By [Sarah Allam \(/writers/sarah-allam/\)](#) STAFF WRITER

1 day ago

UPDATED: Nov. 30, 2017 at 12:49 a.m.

Before the start of most events at Syracuse University, one of the event's sponsors will say the following: "I therefore acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation, the indigenous people on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stands."

The university rests on sacred grounds. Students learn, eat, sleep and party on land that was once owned by the Onondaga Nation.

"The Onondaga are the fire keepers, which means they are the capital of the confederacy," said Philip Arnold, chair of SU's department of religion as well as a core faculty member of Native American and indigenous studies.

The nation's history is shared at Skä•noñh – Great Law of Peace Center, which opened in 2015. Skä•noñh means "peace and harmony with the natural world." The center, which opened after years of research, development and obstacles, chronicles the history of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy from the perspective of the nations. It is an extension of the Onondaga Historical Association.

Sandy Bigtree, member of the Indigenous Values Initiative and wife to Arnold, said their focus was to educate a broader audience while maintaining the integrity of the Haudenosaunee narrative.

"You can find what the Dutch think or the Spanish think, but you can't find their perspective anywhere else in the world," Bigtree said.

Perspectives featured at the center include the history of the peacemaker's arrival, the Seneca Falls women's rights movement, lacrosse and the gentrification of the Native people through religion and boarding school.

Bigtree said opening and maintaining the center has been a struggle, but the Onondaga asked her to because there is no other place to learn about who they truly are.

SU neighbors Onondaga Lake, a place the Onondaga people consider sacred as it has given them life and bounty for thousands of years. They've shared this with the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, of which they are a member and a leader, and the settlers of Syracuse and central New York.

"We have gratitude for Mother Earth. There is no real difference between our mother's needs and our needs. Gratitude is what unites us," said Onondaga chief Jake Edwards.



He spoke of how his ancestors welcomed settlers to New York and attempted to show them the ways of gratitude that would prolong the lives of seven future generations. Edwards said this hospitality was taken for granted. Syracuse became “The Salt City” when Onondaga Lake was harvested for salt, resulting in the lake becoming once the most polluted in the United States.

“It was white, gold and a high commodity,” said Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the OHA. “Salt from that lake provided over 85 percent of the country’s supply when it was most important. It helped the North win the civil war, and that created this whole city.”

Despite the contamination of their land, the Onondaga people still practice the traditional longhouse ceremonies that have been lost to many other nations over the years.

“The Chancellor has now begun saying that we are on Onondaga territory and everything starts with that statement, but not a lot of people know the significance of what that means,” Arnold said. “I would like to see every Syracuse University student go to the Skä•noñh center.”

CORRECTION: In a previous version of this post, Philip Arnold’s position was misstated. Arnold is the chair of SU’s department of religion and is a faculty member of Native American and indigenous studies. The Daily Orange regrets this error.

CORRECTION: In a previous version of this post, the Onondaga were misstated as having moved to Wisconsin. The Daily Orange regrets this error.

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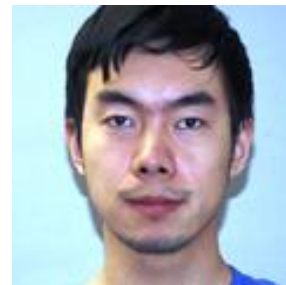
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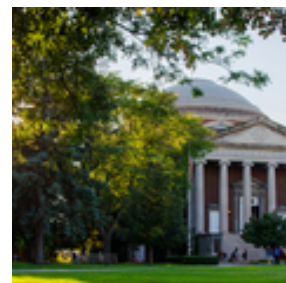


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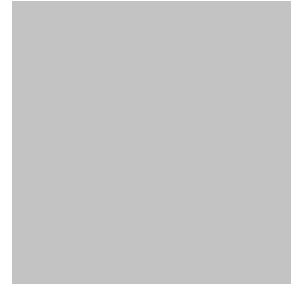


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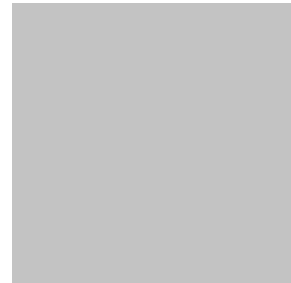


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By The Daily Orange Sports Staff | November 29, 2017

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