

Historical association returns relics

Onondaga Nation leaders receive sacred wampum belt, donate replica.

By Sarah Moses
Staff writer

The Onondaga Historical Association returned a wampum belt to the Haudenosau-nee Tuesday in an act that Onondaga Nation leaders described as historical, unprecedented and an act of friendship.

OHA Executive Director Gregg Tripoli presented the wampum to Tadodaho Sid Hill, a spiritual leader for the

Onondaga Nation, and other nation leaders during a ceremony at the museum on Montgomery Street in Syracuse.

The return of the belt completed a series of voluntary repatriations, including human remains, that the association made to the Onondaga Nation this spring.

"To honor this great heritage of the Haudenosaunee and particularly the Onondaga Nation, the native inhabitants of this land and the wampum keepers of the Haudenosaunee confederacy, OHA has voluntarily repatriated from our collections sacred items and items



**See a related
video at
[syracuse.com/
videos](http://syracuse.com/videos).**

of cultural patrimony to the Onondaga Nation," Tripoli said.

Under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, objects of historical, traditional or cultural importance to any Native American group must be returned. The law, however, doesn't apply to the OHA because it covers only federally funded museums.

Onondaga Nation leaders said they were glad the OHA returned the items without being forced by law or court decision.

"There are still a lot of our masks and our remains out there," Hill said. "We see some of our belts being auctioned off on the Internet, and our people just don't understand. Those are our sacred objects."

The wampum was at OHA since 1919. It was previously in the possession of a family in Minoa.

Onondaga Nation Chief

Wampum belt given to Onondaga Nation

WAMPUM, FROM PAGE A-3

Jake Edwards said the nation leaders are still researching the details of the belt's meaning. Edwards said it's clear repairs were made to the belt, which is made of white and purple shells.

A replica of the belt was made by Onondaga Nation Faithkeeper Tony Gonyea and presented to OHA. Gonyea,

who is an artist, said it took him about 80 hours of work to complete the replica.

In addition to the wampum belt, OHA returned four ceremonial masks, known as "false faces," and bones, which were buried by the Onondaga Nation.

Hill hopes the actions of OHA will lead other museums and private collectors to return sacred items to the Haudeno-

saunee.

Wendy Gonyea, a faithkeeper for the Onondaga Nation, said it was important to thank the Creator for the return of the items. She said the day was uplifting and shows the friendship among Central New York and Onondaga leaders.

Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner, Onondaga County Executive Joanne Mahoney and other local leaders attended the

presentation.

"We as a community had a wrong that needed to be righted," Mahoney said. "Thanks to the Haudenosaunee for me personally, for this community and for our country. Thank you for your patience. We continue to need your guidance, your wisdom and your friendship."

Contact Sarah Moses at smoses@syracuse.com or 470-2298.