

Onondaga Historical Association to transform county historic site into Haudenosaunee museum



By [Glenn Coin, The Post-Standard](#)

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Gregg Tripoli (left), executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association, returns a wampum belt that has been in the association's possession back to Tadodaho Sid Hill, Jake Edwards, a member of the council of chiefs, and Tony Gonyea, faith keeper, of the Onondaga Nation, during a June news conference at the museum. The historical association and the Onondaga Nation plan to open a museum near Onondaga Lake.

Photo by Peter Chen / The Post-Standard

The [Onondaga Historical Association](#) plans to take over the [Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois](#) site in January and transform it into a museum that tells the [history](#) of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, Confederacy.

The site near Onondaga Lake will be renamed and will focus on the oral history of the confederacy, a group of five and later six tribes that spanned what is now New York State.

Under a contract with Onondaga County, which will continue to own the site, the historical association hopes to add new exhibits, classrooms, a restaurant and a lacrosse facility.

"It has the potential to be really world [class](#)," said Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the association.

The OHA is working with the Onondaga Nation, one of the nations in the confederacy, and with Le Moyne College and Syracuse University.

Onondaga County has appropriated \$75,000 of seed money, and the association will add an additional \$75,000 to get the project off the ground. Most of that money will be used to hire a full-time museum manager who will run the site and devise a long-term plan for the new center.

The Sainte Marie site commemorates encounters in the 17th century between French Jesuits and the Haudenosaunee. That narrow slice of history will be replaced by the broad sweep of centuries of Haudenosaunee history, said Bill Fisher, deputy Onondaga County executive.

"It really expands the stories that are told at that park to incorporate a much broader length of time," Fisher said.

That history needs to be told, said Tadadaho Sid Hill, the [spiritual](#) leader of the [Onondaga Nation](#), one of the tribes of the confederacy.

"Whatever they're teaching now in [schools](#) is insufficient as to who we are and what we've done," Hill said.

Hill said the Onondaga plan to [provide](#) expertise and knowledge, but not valuable artifacts. He said the Onondaga are the only Haudenosaunee nation involved in the project.

The Sainte Marie site has a visitor's center that will be the site of the new museum. Several other buildings on the grounds could be turned into classrooms, lecture halls and other spaces, Tripoli said.

"With very little money I think we can expand the useable space without adding buildings," he said.

Plans for a similar museum announced in 1999 went nowhere. Then, the Metropolitan Development Association and the Onondaga Nation said they would seek funding to build a Haudenosaunee museum near Onondaga Lake. That never materialized.

Onondaga Lake holds deep historical significance for the Haudenosaunee. The confederacy was formed, the Onondaga say, when the Peacemaker came across the lake and persuaded the Onondaga that the five nations should live in peace with each other, according to Haudenosaunee oral history.

OHA's proposal to Onondaga County:

[HHC - Plan for 2013](#)

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MEMO TO: William Fisher

September 26, 2012

Our plans for developing the Haudenosaunee Heritage Center will begin in the calendar year 2013. The appropriation from the county will be used to pay for labor expenses to perform the following functions:

- Hiring a full-time employee to manage the planning for the Center, to act as liaison between OHA and the Nation, the county, Friends of Historic Onondaga Lake, and the coalition of local Universities and Colleges who will make up the heart of the Great Law of Peace Educational Center. This person will also be developing a facility plan to establish a new museum, public space, classrooms, etc. as well as plans for a restaurant, retail operation, and a future lacrosse facility. He/she will also be building a volunteer base to help operate the facility and work with OHA's Development Department to create a fundraising strategy and oversee grant applications for the purpose of raising funds. He will also be managing the facility, including the facility attendant, and developing programming (including lectures, events, educational programs, lacrosse demonstrations, public events like arts & Crafts Fairs, concerts, etc. that we hope to be able to offer during the transitional planning year of 2013. He will also be developing the retail operation and planning for the full operation of a retail operation in conjunction with OHA's existing Museum Gift Gallery (OHA's retail flagship store). He will also be overseeing an inventory of the objects and materials currently housed at the facility.
- Hiring a facility attendant to attend to the front desk, interface with visitors, and operate the gift shop, open and close the facility, and interface with maintenance, deliveries, etc.
- OHA's Education Department will be spending additional time to develop educational programming for grade and high school students, in conjunction with educators at the Nation school.
- OHA's Development Director will be spending additional time to help create a fundraising strategy and to write grants for additional funding. She will also be interfacing with the local foundations for support during the transition to a new facility, including funding for computer system integration, stationery, telephone system, etc.
- OHA's museum staff will be spending additional time to plan the layout of the new museum as well as developing the story that will be told through the artifacts, documents, and exhibit labels. This planning will also include exhibit case design and any audio/visual and/or interactive displays that will be part of the museum aspect of the facility. They will also be conducting an inventory of the artifacts and materials currently housed at the facility.
- OHA's History Curators will be working to develop the historical accuracy of the story to be told. They will also be spending time to put the Haudenosaunee history in a larger context of the simultaneous history of our community, our state, our nation, and the world at large.

- OHA's Accounting Department will be creating a financial framework of reports, including all related financial statements, charts of accounts, donations, grants, and general revenue and expenses for the Center in addition to the necessary salary, taxes, benefits, and health insurance and 403b plans that are required of OHA for every employee.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gregg A. Tripoli".

Gregg A. Tripoli
Executive Director