

STATEMENT BY GREGG TRIPOLI, Executive Director, Onondaga Historical Association
Press Conference at County Executive offices, 23 January 2013

As of January 1st, 2013, under a License Agreement with Onondaga County, OHA has assumed management of the county facility currently known as Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois on Onondaga Lake Parkway in Liverpool. We now begin a year of planning to re-purpose that site into a Haudenosaunee Heritage Center.

This Agreement has transpired as a result of many meetings that OHA has had with the County Executive's office over the course of the past few years.

County Executive Mahoney and OHA both recognize the profound impact that the Haudenosaunee and, in particular, the Onondaga Nation have had on the history of this area, as well as on the larger scale of our state and our nation.

Their history has, for the most part, been related, often erroneously, through the perspective of others, beginning principally with European contact during the 17th century. In fact, as the original inhabitants of this land, their history extends back far beyond that point.

The Haudenosaunee influence on our collective history is immeasurable and includes everything from women's rights to our form of government, to sports, fashion, domestic life, military strategies, farming methods, environmental stewardship, and much more.

OHA and the County Executive felt it was important that this fascinating and important part of our collective history be told in direct collaboration with, and in concert with the active participation of, the Haudenosaunee people. OHA has a relationship with the Onondaga Nation that has been strengthened over the past few years; a relationship based on mutual trust and understanding. We honor and respect the oral history tradition of the Longhouse that continues to this very day.

Onondaga Lake is sacred to the Onondaga Nation and the Haudenosaunee and it is central to their history, from the source of sustenance to the legendary Hiawatha and the founding of the Great Law of Peace. It also plays a pivotal role in our community's modern history from the center of international diplomacy among the French, English, and Dutch to the establishment of the city of Syracuse, to a symbol of industrial pollution, to a national model of advanced technological environmental remediation, in which the Onondaga Nation plays a prominent role. It is, therefore, a particularly appropriate place to establish a Haudenosaunee Heritage Center.

Almost one year ago, I saw a letter to the editor in the Post-Standard written by Dr. Philip Arnold, of Syracuse University, and I realized that he had a vision for the Sainte Marie site that was extremely compatible with the proposal we were developing. In hopes of his involvement in the establishment of a unique educational component to the Heritage Center, I contacted Dr. Arnold.

Since then, we have had meetings with the Onondaga Nation leadership, the County Executive, and the presidents of our local colleges and universities in an effort to create an educational collaborative that deals with the foundational values of the Longhouse tradition espoused in the Thanksgiving Address and the Great Law of Peace.

Dr. Arnold, who is a well-known educator, lecturer, and author served as the Director of Native American Studies at Syracuse University and will be the founding director of our educational center.

I would like to thank the County Executive for her vision, her leadership, her support, and for her respect and reverence for the great history of Onondaga County and, in this particular case, her respect for the Native American history of this area. Without her vision and her dedication to maximizing the potential of this wonderful community amenity, we would not be making this announcement today.