LAX TRACKS

Alf Jacques will display his work at this weekend's Haudenosaunee Wooden Stick Lacrosse Expo

By Renée K. Gadoua
If Jacques, a traditional Onondaga, learned from his father 50 years ago to make lacrosse sticks. Each stick takes eight months to a year to craft, and he sells them for about $350 each. For now, he’s stopped taking orders and says he’s backed up about 14 months.

He attributes the increased business to the growing interest in the Native American roots of lacrosse and the 2012 release of the movie Crooked Arrows.

Jacques, one of a handful of Native Americans making traditional sticks, creates them from the wood of a hickory tree, and shapes, carves and dries them.

“It’s made for the game only,” he said.

“It’s not something to hang on the wall. It’s for the game of lacrosse.”

The game is so important to the Haudenosaunee that many are buried with their lacrosse sticks. “It’s said you can play the game in the spirit world with your ancestors,” Jacques said.

Jacques will demonstrate his work Saturday, Sept. 28, and Sunday, Sept. 29, at the Haudenosaunee Wooden Stick Lacrosse Expo at Onondaga Lake Park, in Liverpool. The event also includes wooden-stick exhibition games, clinics, by players from the Iroquois Nationals and Onondaga Redhawks lacrosse teams, Native arts and crafts, entertainment and food and apparel vendors. The Expo is sponsored by Syracuse University, the Onondaga Historical Association and Skà:nónh – Great Law of Peace Center.

The purpose is to celebrate and educate people about the Native roots of lacrosse, said Philip Arnold, associate professor of religion at SU and founding director of Skà:nónh, the Native American museum under development at the site of the former Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois museum.

The history of the game goes back thousands of years, to the time when the five original nations of the Haudenosaunee were warring. When they came together under the Great Law of Peace, they played lacrosse near the site of this weekend’s expo.

“Lacrosse is not a war game. Lacrosse is not a peace game,” says Arnold, author of The Gift of Sports: Indigenous Ceremonial Dimensions of the Games We Love, who has taught a course on the topic. “It’s not Jum-baya. It’s a very aggressive, hard game. Out of that energetic contest comes the knowledge of each other.”

The Haudenosaunee call it the Creator’s Game, and consider it a spiritual ceremony. Since non-Natives cannot play or watch the ceremonial games, the exhibition games at the expo will not be the spiritual version.

“We want to maintain a respectful distance from the ceremonial traditions and explain them to those who are not Haudenosaunee,” he says.
Just the Facts

**What:** Haundenosaunee Wooden Stick Lacrosse Expo

**Where:** Onondaga Lake Park ball fields, near the park entrance in Liverpool

**When:** Saturday, Sept. 26, and Sunday, Sept. 27, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Cost:** Free admission and free parking

Field

8:30 a.m.: Opening by Tadodaho Sid Hill
9 to 10 a.m.: Clinic with Miles and Lyle Thompson
11 a.m. to noon: Old Sticks Game 1
Noon to 1 p.m.: Social dancing
1 to 2 p.m.: Old Sticks Game 2
3 to 4 p.m.: Old Sticks Game 3
10 a.m., noon, 2 and 4 p.m.: Alf Jacques stick-making demonstrations

Media tent

9 to 10 a.m.: Gary Gait
11 a.m. to noon: Gewas Schindler, Iroquois Nationals

Field

9 to 10 a.m.: Clinic with Brett Bucktooth and Jeremy Thompson
11 a.m. to noon: Old Sticks Game 4
Noon to 1 p.m.: Social dancing
1 to 2 p.m.: Old Sticks Game 5
3 to 4 p.m.: Old Sticks Game 6
10 a.m., noon, 2 and 4 p.m.: Alf Jacques stick-making demonstrations

Media tent

11 a.m. to noon: Chief Oren Lyons
1 to 2 p.m.: Neal Powless and Tyler Hill on the movie Crooked Arrows

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Highlights of Lacrosse History

1636

French missionary priest Jean Brebouf describes "Le jeu de la crosse" as looking like a bishop’s crozier and named the game "lacrosse."

1932

After Iroquois play in the Los Angeles Olympics, the USA Lacrosse Association banned all Native teams from playing field lacrosse because it considered the Natives "professional" players.

1983

Iroquois Nationals, the national lacrosse team of the Haundenosaunee, founded.

1990

Iroquois Nationals admitted into the Federation of International Lacrosse.

1992

Onondaga Chief Oren Lyons, who attended Syracuse University on an athletic scholarship, is named to the National Lacrosse Hall of Fame. Lyons was an All-American at SU and, with his teammate Jim Brown, he led SU to an undefeated season in 1958.

2015

Iroquois Nationals will host the 2015 World Indoor Lacrosse Championships at the Onondaga Nation arena Tsha'ho'nonyen'dakhwa' and at the First Niagara Center, in Buffalo. It will be the first time an international sporting event will be held on indigenous land.

—Sources: iroquoisnationals.org, onondaganation.org, uslacrosse.org