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Onondaga Lake Park expo promotes traditional Native American lacrosse

By [Madina Toure](#)
September 30, 2013

The first annual Haudenosaunee Wooden Stick Expo featured exhibition lacrosse games, Native American craft vendors, stick-making demonstrations, and social dancing.

Seneca Nation member Todd Gates was heartbroken when a hip replacement surgery in 2009 forced him to stop playing lacrosse for 10 years. But it was lacrosse that helped him recover.

"It was really depressing at the time," said Gates, 53, of Buffalo and former tribal council leader for the Seneca Nation. "Lacrosse brought me back into being the guy that I thought I could be."

Last summer, Gates and his brother, Leroy Gates, considered hosting the world's largest lacrosse game, but eventually decided on a more traditional lacrosse event; an idea that instantly resonated with people.

"It's a foundation for how young men can develop their skills to be leaders in the community and develop a teamwork, community-minded knowledge and vision for how to get things done," he said.

The first annual Haudenosaunee Wooden Stick Expo, held on the south end of Onondaga Lake Park on Sept. 28 and 29, celebrated the five Native American nations uniting to play lacrosse, known as De-wa-eoh in the Seneca language, or the Creator's Game. [Skā-noñh – Great Law of Peace Center](#), hosted the event in conjunction with the [Onondaga Historical Association](#), Syracuse University and the

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Photo: Kaitlyn Richards

The first annual Haudenosaunee Wooden Stick Expo was held at Onondaga Lake Park on Sept. 28 and 29.

also a construction manager, lacrosse relaxes him and gives him energy to handle the challenges of his job.

“When I’m out there on the field, I concentrate on strategies of lacrosse and think about my brothers out there that I just want to have fun with and meeting up with my old friends,” he said.

The event drew 5,000 to 10,000 over the course of the weekend.

Onondaga Nation.

The event featured exhibition games in which Haudenosaunee men played with wooden lacrosse sticks and leather balls, Native American craft vendors, stick-making demonstrations, social dancing, food and youth clinics hosted by the Onondaga Redhawks and the Iroquois Nationals.

Lacrosse originated over 1,000 years ago as a gift from the Creator for his enjoyment, Gates explained, to unite individuals of different abilities and to settle differences between nations, towns and villages.

The exhibition games, known as the Old Sticks Game, featured players aged 40 and older.

Roughly 20 players, including Gates, participated in a total of six old sticks games. For Gates, who is

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THE GEAR

- THE BALL** (Icon: Red ball) They're like tiny balls, yellow or orange solid rubber!
- THE STICK** (Icon: Lacrosse stick) Made up of 3 parts: the head, mesh, and shaft!
- THE HELMET** (Icon: Helmet) Haven't used all the 1928 Olympics!
- THE GLOVE** (Icon: Glove) Only required for men's lacrosse!

THE MOVES

- CRADLING (Icon: Player cradling stick)
- PASSING (Icon: Player passing stick)
- CATCHING (Icon: Player catching ball)
- DEFENDING (Icon: Player defending)
- SHOOTING (Icon: Player shooting ball)

THE FIELD & PLAYERS

110 YARDS (width), 60 YARDS (length)

- ATTACKERS** (Icon: Blue circle) These 3 players main job is to score!
- DEFENSEMEN** (Icon: Red circle) These 3 players help the goalkeeper in preventing the other team from scoring!
- MIDFIELDERS** (Icon: Yellow circle) These 3 players play both attack and defense as they can move the ball from one end of the field to the other!
- GOALKEEPER** (Icon: Orange circle) The goalkeeper's job is to defend the 6 ft by 8 ft goal!

THE HISTORY

The Haudenosaunee people used the Onondaga Nation have been playing the game of lacrosse for over a thousand years. The Onondagos call the game Oye-Hon-She-Gwa'-Oye (pronounced: Oye being hip!) For them, the game is far more than just a sporting event, it is a healing and spiritual gift from their Creator.

LACROSSE: THE LONG & SHORT OF IT

Infographic: Miriam Taylor

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