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LIVIN' IN LIVERPOOL

BY RUSS TARBY

Looking forward to Skä·noñh - Great Law of Peace Center

After going dark for more than three years, the old French Fort's fixin' to rekindle its fires more brightly than ever.

The facility – which has been known as Saint Marie Among the Iroquois for the past two decades – will now be known as Skä·noñh – Great Law of Peace Center thanks to a joint effort by the Onondaga Historical Association, Onondaga County, the Onondaga Nation and local colleges.

Organizers had hoped to open the museum at 6680 Onondaga Lake Parkway this year, but – as often happens with undertakings of this magnitude – it has been delayed. But we'll learn the latest this Thursday, Dec. 4.

The Great Law of Peace Center's founding director, Philip Arnold, has coordinated a day-long symposium on "Indigenous Perspectives on Museums and Cultural Centers" at Syracuse University and that evening at the Peace Center, right here in Liverpool.

Transformative museums

An associate professor of religion at SU, Arnold said Thursday's symposium will "foster a general conversation about the transforming roles of museums with respect to Indigenous communities as well as highlight our ongoing planning and design of the Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center."

OHA has nearly completed Phase II of the project developing detailed content and narrative and the selection of collection items. The museum will likely open to the public in fall 2015, according to Daniel Connors, an OHA staffer who will serve as its general manager.

The main themes of the center's permanent exhibits will begin with the concept of Skä·noñh, which means peace and wellness. "A welcoming message will introduce visitors to the oral history tradition and the importance of language in maintaining a culture," Connors said. "And the Creation Story and the Thanksgiving Address will underscore the connection between the Haudenosaunee and the environment."

The Onondaga Nation, located south of Syracuse, maintains the Central Fire – the spiritual and political foundation – of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, consisting of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga and Tuscarora nations.

The center will celebrate the Great Law of Peace established on the shores of Onondaga Lake creating the first representative democracy in the west. The Haudenosaunee perspective on European/Native American contact and colonialism will be explored with an emphasis on local contact represented by the recreated 17th century Jesuit mission of Sainte Marie de Gannentaha.

'French Fort' revisited

At Thursday's Indigenous Perspectives symposium a light lunch will be served at noon at Room 500, at SU's Hall of Languages, than Arnold will open the program, followed by Ann Drumheller from the National Museum of the American Indian, and Debora Ryan from SU's office of Cultural Foundations in Education. Ryan will recall the facility's earliest days as a museum in her talk, "Revisiting the 'French Fort:' Sainte Marie de Gannentaha, 1933-1943."

After a break, at 3 p.m. SU's director of Native American studies, Scott Stevens, will discuss cultural centers in Haudenosaunee territory, followed by art and music historian Sascha Scott who will talk about "Transcultural Objects and Ethical Oversights."

The symposium will reconvene at 6 p.m. for a dinner reception at Skä·noñh – Great Law of Peace Center, on the Parkway. Diners will hear from Rick Hill, the center’s Native American consultant from the Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic. Hill’s talk is titled “Rethinking the Presentation of Haudenosaunee Culture.”

“We’ll focus on how to create an exhibition of Indigenous ideas and philosophies within which anyone can find meaning,” Arnold said. 428-1864 ext. 314, skanohcenter.org

Arnold returns in April

As we draw closer to the Great Law of Peace Center’s opening next year, Phil Arnold will update the Liverpool community about the new museum at 7 p.m. April 27, at Liverpool Public Library. That program is sponsored by the Historical Association of Greater Liverpool.

‘Silver Bells’ ring out

When the DeSantis Band returns to the Liverpool Public Library at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7, the holiday concert will spotlight two of Liverpool’s best-ever musicians – saxophonist Joe Riposo and vocalist Keith Condon..

The band also features singer Maria DeSantis, keyboardist Jimmy Cox, drummer Peter Chwazik, flutist Brian Scherer and guitarists Joe Ferlo and Mark Copani.

Maria and the boys have worked up new selections such as “The Christmas Waltz,” “All Through The Night,” “Joseph’s Song,” “Silver Bells” along with special arrangements by Joe Riposo. The concert is free and open to the public; 457-0310; lpl.org.

Santa at Johnson Park!

Later on Sunday American Legion Post 188 hosts its annual Christmas in the Park featuring an appearance by Santa Claus from 6 to 8 p.m. Dec. 7, at Johnson Park. Merry, merry indeed!