

OHA director answers reader comments about new Skä•noñh - Great Law of Peace Center



Museum goers stand around a fire in the center of the re-creation of a French mission, at the Sainte Marie among the Iroquois in this 2008 file photo. The Onondaga Historical Association is turning the site into the Skä-nonh Great Law of Peace Center to tell the story of the Iroquois. *(Nicholas Lisi)*

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. - Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association, responded to a [recent story about the transformation](#) of the old Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois to the new Skä-nonh Great Law of Peace Center.

The name is pronounced like "Skah-no" with the last nh silent. It is a greeting in the Onondaga language that means peace and wellness.

The Great Law of Peace Center will teach the history and values of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois Confederacy, in keeping with their oral history tradition. There will be plenty of objects and art, but they are not the focus. The objects will be used to support the oral history.

The center explores the Great Law, which was established on the shores of Onondaga Lake to make peace among five warring Haudenosaunee nations.

Tripoli wrote:

"It was certainly not a perfect world. The resulting union created one of the most formidable entities on the continent and was the first representative democracy in the west. The concept and story of the Great Law was used by Founding Fathers, like John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, to help convince 13 separate colonies to come together to form a more perfect union.

It created a society that put women in positions of leadership, which helped inspire the women who started the Women's Rights movements in central New York. It launched the colloquialism, "Bury the Hatchet" and brought us the real legend of Hiawatha. The story of the Great Law includes imagery and symbolism that are repeated in our national seal and represented on every dollar bill."

Tripoli replied to Syracuse.com reader comments:

CrookedNose wrote: "Why I wonder do people get all up in arms against Native culture? I personally wish there was more things in Syracuse to remind us of the Onondaga people."

Tripoli: "It is a story, and a history, that should make our community proud and will interest everyone who doesn't know that these, and many other important and fascinating components of our national history and identity, originated right here on the shores of our little lake as part of the amazing story of our native neighbors."

MyOpinion wrote: "Another ridiculous waste of tax dollars."

Tripoli: The Center was developed and is being built with NO taxpayer funds. 25% of the total cost came from the surplus of Room and Occupancy Tax, which no resident pays unless they are living in a hotel. Two \$80,000 grants came from Empire State Development and the rest of the funds were from private sources, including local foundations.

neveryou wrote: "Exactly how much money has come from the Onondaga Nation?"

Tripoli: The Onondaga Nation provided the largest individual component of the private funding. In addition, Nation representatives and leaders have

donated thousands of volunteer hours toward the development of the narrative and the design of the Center. The facility is currently an unutilized community asset that is in great shape and is located in our county's most visited park. The additional non-taxpayer funded cost of turning it into a completely new attraction is actually very small compared to what most new museums require. The real waste of taxpayers' money would have been to let it remain unused.

(Tripoli said the exact amount of the Onondaga donation is private, unless the nation chooses to share the dollar amount.)

aberrant wrote: "The French fort had a large spiked wooden wall around it to protect the settlers from the super nice native people. There, history is fixed."

russtarby wrote: "when the French 'fort' was first established in the early-1930s, it had adapted the image of a Western 'fort,' totally buying into the Hollywood-driven idea of cowboys versus indians...unfortunately that wasn't really the story behind the Jesuit mission..."

Tripoli: The Mission of Sainte Marie was, in fact, a mission and not a fort. The palisades (the "spiked wooden wall") make it look like a fort and it will probably always be known as the "French Fort". The truth is, both native and non-native communities at the time commonly used palisades around their structures as protection against animals and elements, as well as enemies.

As part of the design, we hope to provide the visitor with a description, as well as a depiction, of what the lakefront may have looked like prior to 1600 so we hope you will come to check it out when it opens.

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