

ONEIDA

QUARTERLY MEMBER NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE:

**A Message from the
Nation Representative** pg. 2-3

**Oneida Indian Nation Police
Celebrate 30 Years** pg. 3

**Mary C. Winder Community Center
Construction Update** pgs. 4-5

Three Sisters Dinner Returns pg. 6-7

**Nation Honors Veterans at Annual
Breakfast** pgs. 8-9

**Jr. YAP Makes Delicious
Desserts** pg. 10

**Elders Enjoy Early Thanksgiving
Luncheon** pg. 11

**New Recreation Supervisor/
Halloween Party** pg. 12



Winter 2024



A Message *from the* Nation Representative

Shekólih. As we begin another remarkable year here at the Oneida Indian Nation, it is important that we take the time to reflect on all that the Creator has provided, and for the opportunities that lay before us, with thankfulness. While we have much to be grateful for, we also know that our focus must remain on the journey before us.

“Looking behind I am filled with gratitude. Looking forward I am filled with vision. Looking upwards I’m filled with strength. Looking within I discover peace.”
– American Indian proverb

Our People - our Nation - remain strong as we are poised to begin a new chapter in the resurgence of our homelands with the anticipated opening of the Mary C. Winder Community Center later this year. This new facility, which will be one of the largest of its kind in Indian Country, will truly be the center of our Nation. Like all our endeavors, it will benefit our Members today and unto the seventh generation by supporting the preservation of our culture and the revitalization of our people.

ONYOTA’A:KÁ:

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NOTE: Council meetings are not being held at this time for health and safety concerns for our Members during the Covid-19 pandemic. Contact: The Oneida Indian Nation, P.O. Box 1, Vernon, NY 13476 or use the Member App.

As we continue this work on our ancestral homelands, we also understand the importance of partnerships between tribal nations to achieve these goals and many others for our Members and for all Native people. To this end, in October, the Oneida Indian Nation hosted the United South and Eastern Tribes’ (USET) Annual Meeting at Turning Stone Resort Casino. We were pleased to host representatives from USET’s 33 tribal nation membership here as it has long been our tradition to welcome all visitors to our homelands with the warmest hospitality.

The USET motto – Because there is Strength in Unity – is something that resonates with the Oneida People. As the Peacemaker taught our ancestors when bringing the original Five Nations together under the Great Law of Peace, one arrow is easily broken, but a bundle of five remains strong together.

The strength and unity created through USET supports our ability to advocate for the rights and needs of all of our people. As a supporter of USET, we understand better than anyone that our fight to ensure our voices are not ignored, as they too often have been in the past, is a fight that will never end. While we have made tremendous progress, we recognize that progress was made possible because we have stayed focused and resolute on the core issues confronting all tribal nations.

Issues like cultural preservation, restoration of homelands and authority over the management and protection of natural resources, sustainable economic growth and the foundations of quality of life for our people, such as education, healthcare, housing and infrastructure, are paramount.

Of equal importance is what is perhaps the defining issue faced by tribal nations across the United States, the continued defense of our sovereignty – including encroachment by agents outside Indian Country and intrusion by tribes that have left long ago but continue to unjustly claim authority in the decisions and governance of sovereign nations.

The Oneida Indian Nation is proud to be part of this organization and understands the value of its advocacy in these areas and so many others. As you know, two Nation Members, both Oneida Indian Nation Council Members, have served in the role of USET President – Brian Patterson (2006-2016) and Keller George (1994-2006), who passed away in 2023.

Throughout his life, Keller embodied the role of the Oneida People as America’s First Allies as an Army veteran serving in the Korean War and a 22-year veteran of the United States Air Force. In addition to his service to the United States, Keller tirelessly dedicated himself to the Oneida People and representing our Nation in local, state and national matters. He became a Council Member at a formative time for the Nation and provided critical leadership as we developed some of the most essential programs and services our Members rely on.

He was equally committed to elevating all Native people and devoted his efforts to a number of organizations serving Indian Country, including serving as a delegate for the National Congress of American Indians and as a member of the Board of Directors for the National Tribal Development Association. To ensure the full and accurate telling of our peoples’ stories, he was also named to the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian’s Board of Trustees.

Keller was extremely dedicated to the work of USET because, like all of our Nation’s leadership, he believed this work was essential for the future of our People and all of Indian Country.

An example of USET’s importance is its advocacy for the adoption and strengthening of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and related federal and state legislation. These efforts have been especially meaningful for our people, as they have profoundly impacted our ability to recently restore the remains of our ancestors and their most sacred artifacts to our homelands.

In 2022 more than 1,500 funerary objects and other cultural artifacts were repatriated to our People from the collections of the Longyear Museum of Anthropology at Colgate University in the largest single restoration of its kind in New York State history. Last February, the remains of three Oneida ancestors were returned to us by Cornell University. And just a few months ago, the Rochester Museum & Science Center repatriated the remains of 19 Oneida ancestors to our People.

The Oneida people’s journey to the repatriation of our ancestors is a familiar one to all the tribal nations that make up USET. And while all of our nations face unique challenges and pursue unique paths, we remain united by the common struggles and goals of all Native people. It is why the Oneida Indian Nation will continue to support USET in every way possible.

Through decades of tireless work, we have achieved a brighter future for the Oneida people and, through our work with USET, for all Native people. As we look ahead to the coming year and the formation of our next generation of leaders, we can never rest in this work. We know that there will be familiar challenges ahead as well as new opportunities. Yet we are confident that we are prepared no matter what the future brings – because there is strength in unity.

Nλ ki’ wa,
Ray Halbritter
Nation Representative



Oneida Indian Nation Police Celebrate 30 Years, Henderson Retires

On Thursday, Sept. 21, the Oneida Indian Nation Police Department was recognized for 30 years of service by federal, state and local law enforcement officials, including the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of New York, Oneida County District Attorney, Madison County District Attorney, New York State Police and the Oneida County and Madison County Sheriffs.

Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter also recognized Oneida Indian Nation Police Chief Gary Henderson for his 14 years of service with the department and congratulated him on his retirement. Chief Henderson has provided outstanding leadership and worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of the Oneida Indian Nation, our Members, the Nation’s enterprises and our local community. Halbritter presented Henderson with a beautiful lacrosse stick handmade by Ron Patterson (Wolf Clan) in a sign of appreciation.

Police Chief Henderson officially retired Oct. 6 and was replaced by Captain David Verne. Verne joined the Nation Police Department in 2012 as a Sergeant and CALEA Coordinator, and he received several promotions leading to his appointment as Captain in 2017. ❖



Mary C. Winder Community Center Construction Moving at Fast Pace

Construction of the Mary C. Winder Community Center in Oneida has been moving along at a nice brisk pace over the past several months.

A multigenerational gathering of Elders, parents and young children participated in a “topping out” ceremony at the construction site in September. Several Members added their names or handprints to the final steel beam, which was hoisted by a massive crane into place atop the towering structure at the new Oneida Neighborhoods Project. Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter inscribed the beam with, “For the Oneida people now and unto the Seventh Generation,” before gathering attendees for a group photo. Enjoy these construction update photos from Jason Rood (Turtle Clan). ❖





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Members Delight in Return of Three Sisters Dinner

A beautiful fall evening ushered in the return of the in-person celebration of the ‘sustainers of life’ with the Oneida Indian Nation’s 27th annual Three Sisters Dinner on Oct. 19. The event held at Turning Stone Resort Casino’s Shenendoah Clubhouse was the first in-person Three Sisters Dinner since 2019, and Nation Members and Health Services clients in attendance were treated to a wonderful event.

The dinner’s theme, “Celebrating a Healthy Harvest,” was prominent throughout with appetizer stations dedicated to each one of the Three Sisters – corn, beans and squash – and a healthy buffet. Three Sisters recipe cards and seed packets were available for take-home at each of the stations as well.

Barbara George-Winton (Wolf Clan) supplied nearly 60 quarts of traditional corn soup for the dinner. She began the process several days in advance with the assistance of her daughter, Chelsea Jocko. Chelsea also delivered the Thanksgiving Address in Onyota’a:ká: before the buffet lines opened.

The annual event is sponsored by the Oneida Indian Nation Health Services’ Yukwata’kali:ték Diabetes Program. This is the fifth Three Sisters Dinner that Mollie Tracy, RDN, CDN Diabetes Program Coordinator for the Oneida Indian

Nation Health Services, has planned. The 2020 dinner was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 and 2022 celebrations were changed into ‘to-go’ dinners for safety precautions.

“It was nice for everyone to see each other again and to celebrate unique, delicious ways to have corn, beans and squash as well as other traditional American Indian dishes,” she said. “Despite a smaller crowd this year, there was excellent participation in the social dancing which was great to see.”

The Yukwata’kali:ték Diabetes Program has received accreditation from the Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists (ADCES) and offers diabetes education sessions at Oneida Indian Nation Health Services by appointment to registered Oneida Members and American Indian clients.

Social dancing led by Chris Thomas (Onondaga), Levi Confer (Turtle Clan) and Wes Halsey (Wolf Clan) closed the event on a beautiful note. Yawá to all who attended. ❖



Nation Honors Veterans at Annual Recognition Breakfast

The Oneida Indian Nation has always shared a special relationship with the United States Armed Forces that dates to the American Revolution. On Wednesday, Nov. 1, we once again honored that relationship and more than 400 of our region’s veterans at the 22nd annual Veterans Recognition Ceremony and Breakfast at Turning Stone Resort Casino. Area veterans and their loved ones, including Nation Members and Turning Stone Enterprises team members, gathered with elected officials from across the region and other guests in recognition of their service.



Chelsea Jocko (Wolf Clan)

Before the event began, Oneida Indian Nation Language Instructor Chelsea Jocko (Wolf Clan), delivered the Thanksgiving Address in the Onyota’a:ká: language. After breakfast, Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter delivered remarks along with Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente, Jr. and Col. Matt Braman, Deputy Commander, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum.



Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter, Fort Drum 10th Mountain Division Deputy Commander Col. Matt Braman and Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente, Jr.



“Our role as First Allies is an element of our shared history of which we are most proud. We have always shared a profound bond with the United States Armed Forces that was forged on the battlefields of the American Revolution. Our connections are more important than the things that divide us, especially when we come together in the name of our highest ideals, such as freedom, community and the recognition of the humanity of all people.”

- Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter

Oneida County Executive Picente talked about a few resources established for local veterans, including the critical veteran suicide prevention program that launched earlier this year to reduce the risk of suicide and improve the well-being of veterans and their families.

“When you look at the American Revolution and who was with the United States, there was only one ally – the Oneidas. There is a monument a few miles from Turning Stone that stands as a symbol of the partnership the Oneida people formed with the United States on the battlefields of

Oriskany,” said Picente. “Today, we need to be as vigilant in the services we provide to all of our local veterans and look forward to a time when there are no homeless veterans and the suicide rate drops tremendously.”

Col. Braman recognized a number of Nation Members who served during his remarks and the enduring friendship between the Oneida People and the United States military that began when our ancestors became America’s First Allies on the battlefields of the Revolutionary War. As he spoke about the meaning and importance of service, he quoted Oneida Indian Nation Council Member and Korean War Veteran Keller George (Wolf Clan), who passed away earlier this year, on the pride he took in serving his country, our people’s legacy of service and growing awareness of Nation Members’ military contributions.



Keller was a veteran of the U.S. Army, serving in the Korean War, and a 22-year veteran of the United States Air Force, where he was a radar operator before retiring with the rank of chief master’s sergeant. During his years in the service in the Air Force he served stateside and in Europe.

“I never drew a distinction between the United States and the Oneida Indian Nation. I went to Korea to defend the United States, that’s true. But I also defended the lands here – our Oneida lands. My ancestors fought with the colonists, and pledged, in the words of our legendary Oneida leaders, “to share the fruits of victory or be buried in a common grave.” That is the obligation my ancestors made, and I will honor it. My ancestors have been in this area since time immemorial, and this area is where we’ll always be.

“When I look at the United States flag, I see the red that symbolizes the blood spilled in war. That’s our blood, too. If I could live my life all over, I would serve in the United States military again. These are the reasons why I’m so pleased that our military contributions are at long last being recognized, and are coming out of the shadows and into the light of day.”

- Keller George (1938-2023)

“I don’t think I could say it any better than that,” said Col. Braman as he closed his remarks and thanked the veterans in attendance and the Nation for hosting the event.



Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter, Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente, Jr., Fort Drum 10th Mountain Division Deputy Commander Col. Matt Braman and Nation Member and U.S. Army Veteran Gil Stout, Jr.

Nation Member Gil Stout, Jr. was honored for his military service as a Teletype Operator with the 508th Maintenance Company in Kaiserslautern, Germany from 1970 to 1972. Gil also has been employed by the Nation for more than 33 years. Representative Halbritter Presented Gil with a blanket inspired by the Warrior’s Circle of Honor Memorial at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, which commemorates the service and sacrifices of Native American veterans.”

The Nation also presented a donation to Feed Our Vets, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing fully stocked food pantries for veterans.

In addition to the Veterans Recognition Event, the Oneida Indian Nation supports local veterans in several ways throughout the year, including offering free golf lessons for Central New York veterans through PGA Hope and salmon fishing at Salmon Acres through Project Healing Waters. The Oneida Indian Nation also partners with several local military and veteran organizations, including Feed Our Vets, Ft. Drum, and more. ❖



Jr. YAP Makes Delicious Desserts

Participants in the Oneida Indian Nation’s Jr. Youth Ambassadors Program (YAP) made some delicious pudding pies with choices of chocolate or vanilla pudding and bananas as a topping – and many mixed all three! – before the Thanksgiving break. The program piggybacks on the After School Program and invites the youth to take on leadership roles and develop important life skills like responsibility, accountability, and how to work together.

This program for the younger kids is the groundwork that helps to grow camaraderie among the participants. The activity was planned by new Youth Development Program Coordinator, Codey Fuller, and Youth Programs Assistant, Kaileigh Gibson (Wolf Clan). They helped prepare the ingredients for the kids and answered any questions they had.

In addition to making the pies, the kids also maintain their own recipe book that they’ll eventually fill up and take home. They wrote down the prep time and ingredients before crafting their own delicious snacks. Participants included: Cavan Jacobs (Wolf Clan), Livia Baker (Wolf Clan), Lakota Torres (Wolf Clan), Jai’el Stout, Harley Hewitt (Wolf Clan), Marlee Thomas and Nathan Brown.

For more information on the Youth Ambassadors Program, the After School Program or any other programming available at the Recreation Center, call (315) 829-8484. ❖



Elders Enjoy Early Thanksgiving Luncheon

It was wonderful to welcome our Elders for an early Thanksgiving Luncheon at the Ray Elm Children & Elders Center on Thursday, Nov. 9. Yawáko: (big thank you!) to all who came out to catch up with family and friends – and enjoy a delicious lunch. ❖



New Rec Supervisor Enthusiastic About Future

Brandon Inman has worked at the Oneida Indian Nation's Recreation Center for a few years, but just recently returned to take on the role of Recreation Supervisor. The new role is something Brandon is excited to take on, and he is looking forward to seeing the Recreation Department continue to grow with the construction of the Mary C. Winder Community Center, which is set to open this year.

A graduate of Herkimer Community College and Cazenovia College, where he received his bachelor's degree, Brandon has been an avid sports fan his entire life. He played baseball at Caz for one year, but played a variety of sports growing up including varsity football and basketball in high school. But it was a class at Caz that really opened his eyes to other prospective career paths.

"I really wanted to be an athletics director," Brandon said. "A professor brought in a guy to speak to our class and he was a facilities operations manager at a college in Houston. He'd run tournaments and oversee rec leagues, and I thought that would be a perfect fit for me."

Brandon is also working on his master's degree in athletic administration. Formerly, he was the Rec Center's Gym Attendant and transitioned to a rec role with the Town of Dewitt before returning as the Nation's Recreation Supervisor.



He said seeing how the Rec Center functioned before assuming the supervisor role has been a great experience. The transition has been smooth, and the center's programming was minimally impacted.

"We're here to help the community and help the kids," he said. "Knowing what to expect for each program has made my job a lot easier. And now we're all excited to see the new place open next year."

The Rec Center is free for Members and Turning Stone Enterprises team members. For more information on the Rec Center, including updated hours and services, you can call 315-829-8484. For now, Brandon is enthusiastic about what the future holds.

"I have four years here so I've been able to develop relationships with Members," Brandon said. "I think they are comfortable with me and I hope to grow those relationships in the future." ❖

Recreation Center Hosts Spooktacular Party

Yawá to all who came out to the Oneida Indian Nation's Halloween Party at the Recreation Center on Saturday, Oct. 28. The popular annual Halloween Party returned for the first time since the pandemic, and we were happy to see so many smiling faces and creative costumes!



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