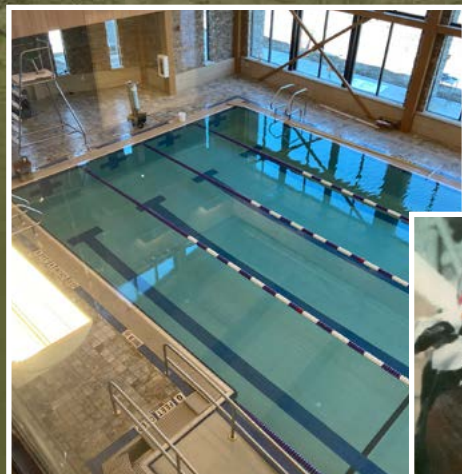


Spring 2024

ONEIDA

QUARTERLY MEMBER NEWSLETTER



SAVE *the* DATE
6.28.24

Grand Opening Festivities
of the
Mary C. Winder
Community Center
for
Oneida Indian Nation
Members and Their families





A Message from the Nation Representative

Shekólih. Our Elders Dinner is one of my favorite annual events because it brings us together to honor our most cherished generation as a community. That is the most important thing we do as leaders - ensure that our people have a strong community to be part of.

That is why I was so excited to share the news with our guests at the dinner about how we are going to strengthen our community unto the seventh generation.

A little less than two years ago, we broke ground on our new community center within the Oneida Neighborhoods Project. Last September, some of you joined us for a topping ceremony to place its final beam.

Now, we are very excited to announce that on Friday, June 28, the Mary C. Winder Community Center will welcome Nation Members for the very first time.

We hope you are all able to be there. We are planning some very special events for everyone to enjoy, and more details will be coming soon.

ONYOTA'A:KÁ:

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TOLL-FREE MEMBER PHONE:

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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.

Our community center will offer a tremendous array of amenities: a pool that is accessible to all, a gymnasium and fitness center and spaces for meals and other gatherings, cultural education, language learning and much more.

There will also be a fieldhouse to host cultural events and lacrosse games. Soon after the community center's grand opening, we will put the lacrosse field to good use by hosting a practice for the Haudenosaunee Nationals women's lacrosse team, which will be open for Members to attend.

Yet the community center will be much more than its facilities.

The community center is one of our most significant investments in the preservation of our culture. Just like the Elders Dinner, the Community Center will be a central meeting place to bring our people together and form even deeper, more meaningful relationships and teach the future generations about our traditions.

The Community Center will be a true home for our people, the heart of a thriving community. A place to honor our history and celebrate our culture.

To this end, the community center will feature a museum-quality exhibit that tells the story of the Oneida people from our origins to our revitalization. When you visit, this exhibit will open with the traditions of our ancestors – the foundational beliefs that continue to shape our decisions today.

As a place where our history is preserved and our culture can flourish, the community center will support the resiliency of our Nation for future generations. Of course, the community center is only one of the many ways in which we will ensure their resiliency. We will continue to grow and diversify our enterprises to support our most essential government services and programs for many years to come.

We will continue to expand our language program and the resources it offers so that all Members have the opportunity to learn our Onyota'a:ká: language.

We will continue to pursue repatriations from cultural and educational institutions across the country, restoring our ancestors and their cultural artifacts to our homelands.

Even with all that we have accomplished, there is still much to do. Our story is far from over. We will never stop reinvesting in our homelands and our people.

Yawá to all who attended our annual Elders Dinner, and for everything you do for our Nation.

Na ki' wa,

Ray Halbritter
Nation Representative



Elders Dinner 2024



Perennial Championship Powerlifter Ray Fougner Sets the Standard

Oneida Elder Ray Fougner (Wolf Clan) continues to rewrite the powerlifting record books. He returned to the world stage in April to showcase his exceptional talent at the 2024 Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) North American Championships held just outside Las Vegas in Loughlin, Nevada. This event also marked a decade of competing in AAU championships, which Ray credits for his improved health throughout his post-retirement life.

For many years, the Oneida Indian Nation has sponsored Ray's participation at powerlifting events across the country where he has served as an ambassador and advocate for promoting healthy living and exercise for Nation Members and all Native people.

On April 5, the day of his 81st birthday, Ray set 13 new world records and earned four gold medals. He also earned the AAU Powerlifting Best Overall Male Lifter Award and the Best Squat Award – two awards that name the best athlete of all competitors, regardless of age.

Powerlifting didn't immediately come to mind when Ray thought of ways to stay fit and healthy after retirement.

"I retired at 62 and I wanted to be able to enjoy it and also stay healthy," Ray recalled. "At the same time, I researched different types of training and conditioning. Strength training had a lot of benefits of fending off disease and staying healthy."

Ray only started powerlifting at the age of 70, but he wasn't a stranger to the weight room either. Ray was a natural athlete and lifted throughout high school when he was playing sports more consistently.

The primary reason for powerlifting later in life was seeing both of his parents struggle with their health. His father was diagnosed with cancer and passed at the age of 66 shortly after retiring. His mother developed diabetes in her 40s and struggled with managing that disease until she passed at the age of 72.

"I tried to learn a lesson from that and made a commitment earlier in my life. I wanted to be healthy for my family," Ray



said. "Weightlifting was part of that, and at 70, just by chance I got into powerlifting."

Ray has spent the last ten years as a World Champion, and now having entered his third age group in competition, he knows his success supports the correlation between strength training and disease prevention.

"Over the years, my story has reached others and has made a difference. I have three family members in their 60s and 70s who are taking powerlifting or distance training and all are doing really well so far. If I can inspire people like that, that's great."

- Ray Fougner (Wolf Clan)

"Over the years, my story has reached others and has made a difference," Ray said. "I have three family members in their 60s and 70s who are taking powerlifting or distance training and all are doing really well so far. If I can inspire people like that, that's great."

In an effort to promote outreach to Native groups, Ray is leading a committee with the AAU that will also aim to get Native children interested in strength sports and educate them on the extraordinary health benefits of those sports. A healthy lifestyle is paramount for all Native people to live longer lives and Ray is happy to be a leader in raising that voice.

"I didn't do this by myself – there are people who helped me get to where I am now," he said. "I want to thank the Oneida Indian Nation for what they're doing to support me." ❖

After School Program Visits Wáhta' Maple Farm

In March, kids enrolled in the Oneida Indian Nation's Youth Ambassadors Program and After School Program enjoyed a quick field trip up the road to Wáhta' Maple Farm to learn how to tap a maple tree with Maple Production Manager, Brendan Schuler. The unseasonably warm day meant it would be a good day to tap, which the kids got to see firsthand.

Brendan began his presentation by asking the kids what they knew about tapping maple trees. They responded with the correct time of year to start tapping (late winter/early spring) and that the sap is used to make maple syrup. But they were surprised to learn the sap released from the tree is actually a tasty sugar water – and that the syrup is made by evaporating the water through constant boiling.

At Wáhta' Maple Farm, the process is made even more efficient with the use of reverse osmosis. The evaporation process, utilizing reverse osmosis and the evaporator, reduces the ratio of sap needed to produce a gallon of syrup from around 50 gallons to around five gallons, which not only increases efficiency but ensures we are getting the most out of the sap we collect.

All of the processes employed by Wáhta' Maple Farm are centered on sustainability. The tree-tapping process minimally impacts maple trees so they can maintain healthy growth. The tap holes are much smaller than those created using traditional tapping practices, which allows the trees to heal much quicker.

After his introduction, Brendan walked the group over to one of the maples and then used an electric drill with a specific maple bit to tap the tree. Almost instantly, the sap started rushing out. He showed the kids how he connects a tube to the



Language Instructor Chelsea Jocko (Wolf Clan) attended the trip with the youth and gave thanks for the many gifts of the maple in the Onyota'a:ká: language. The maple tree – the leader among all trees because it awakens first – provides us with its sugar, faithfully fulfilling its annual promise.

tree, which is the main process the maple farm uses to collect the sap.

The kids even got a look inside the new sap house where all of the lines from the sugar bush meet before being pumped underneath Route 46 to the production facility. In the hour-long demonstration, everybody got to see how the sap gets from the trees atop Peterboro Road down to Territory Road.

Located entirely on Oneida Indian Nation homelands, Wáhta' Maple Farm maintains the highest standards in sustainability and forest management to ensure our forest and lands stay healthy. Sustainability remains a cornerstone of Oneida tradition and is paramount in every decision we make. With Wáhta' Maple Farm, the Nation's youth will now be able to see the maple tree tapping process every year. ❖



The visit provided youth with hands-on opportunities to learn the processes used to collect sap at Wáhta' Maple Farm.

Jessica Jimerson Completes Master's in Accounting

Life moves fast. For Jessica Jimerson (Bear Clan), the past 5 years have been a whirlwind. After graduating high school from Ellicottville in 2019, she knew she wanted to go to college, but was unsure of which path to take or where she should go.

Jessica grew up in Gowanda, New York, south of Buffalo on Seneca territory. As a freshman at Ellicottville, she learned she had exceptional skills in accounting.

"I took an accounting class, and it was a dual-credit class through the Jamestown Business College," Jessica explained.

It was her teacher, Ms. Mason, who told her of her obvious talent with debits and credits.

"I was getting hundreds on tests, and she asked me if I ever thought about accounting as a career," she added. "As the year progressed, I started enjoying it more. She thought I'd be really good at it, which really got me excited about what I thought I could do."

When she graduated in the spring of 2019, Jessica's boyfriend, Jake, wanted to move to Missouri to be closer to his family, so Jessica started looking at colleges down there. His cousin, Kari, attended the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg – about an hour outside of Kansas City – and told her to check it out because of its well-known accounting program.

Jessica decided to take a tour and loved the atmosphere. She raved about its big college feel, but smaller class sizes. She even got a head start on required courses because of her dual-credit classes in high school.

"Since I had dual credits, I didn't have to take the introduction classes, which was a relief," Jessica said. "And the professors were excellent, everyone was super nice."

She was on track to graduate early, but decided to enroll in the school's master's program, which she could complete with just an extra semester of classes. Jessica earned her bachelor's degree in the spring of 2022 – a full year earlier than expected – with a 3.3 GPA. In the fall of 2023, her master's degree program was completed as well.



The accomplishment was especially significant as she was pregnant for the 2021 fall semester and much of the 2022 spring semester. Her son, Kirkey, was born on March 5, 2022.

"It was really hard to navigate," Jessica admits. "Being a first-time mom, you don't know what's going on, and luckily my mom was able to come down and help me."

Her mom, Rene Jimerson, went down for around two months to ease that major transition. As the only one in her family in Missouri, Jessica was grateful her mom could take some time to help her out and watch her son while she went to class.

The school also helped when it could. Professors accommodated Jessica via Zoom when she couldn't make the hour drive or had sleepless nights.

Thanks to all the support she received and her hard work in earning her degrees, Jessica is well-prepared to pursue her dream career. The main reason she wanted to add a master's degree was to prepare for the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam, so she could be licensed and apply to the four big accounting firms – Deloitte, Price Waterhouse, Ernst & Young, and KPMG.

"I've been debating if I want to have a job while studying for the CPA exam because they changed the requirements for how long you can take to get it," Jessica said. "It's really a big undertaking."

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Elders Enjoy Tesla Test-Drives at Turing Stone

Earlier this year, a group of Elders in the Oneida Indian Nation’s Elders Program visited with Tesla at Turning Stone to learn more about Tesla’s fleet of electric vehicles, its new partnership with the Nation and to take some for a test spin around the resort. It was a special program organized by Elders Activities Leader Tammy Patterson (Wolf Clan)



and Kathy Willard, a former Elders Program Manager who now works at Tesla as an Operations Advisor.

Representatives from Tesla gave an overview of the types of vehicles available and addressed some of the more

common misconceptions about electric vehicles such as a reduced range per charge, a lack of acceleration and long charge times.

“I loved all of the technology – the screen and the controls on the steering wheel,” Gloria Kopp (Turtle Clan) said. “The only thing to learn is that taking your foot off the accelerator is going to make you stop as if you’re braking, but I loved it.”

By increasing access to EV direct-to-consumer sales, services and charging throughout the region, the Oneida Indian Nation is continuing its dedication to conservation and sustainability within its ancestral homelands.



Tesla is also partnering with the Nation to install more than 120 Level 2 chargers across the Oneida homelands, including 12 each at the Mary C. Winder Community Center, the Ray Elm Children & Elders Center, the Nation’s administrative offices as well as chargers dedicated to tribal residences.

“I thought they had a nice smooth drive,” Tammy said recapping the event. “They’re a lot of fun with all of the electronics...there’s a small learning curve, but I thought they were awesome.” ❖

Jessica Jimerson Completes Master’s

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She is also interested in forensic accounting and would jump at the opportunity to add a certificate in criminal justice if the opportunity arose. But right now, she is focused on getting her CPA.

Jessica is excited about what the future will hold, and she is grateful for the opportunities the Oneida Indian Nation’s Scholarship Program afforded her. The Nation’s Scholarship Coordinator, Matt Crary, guided her through the oftentimes complex financial aid process.

“[Former Scholarship Coordinator] Lindsey Langdon was so supportive, and the transition to Matt was really smooth,” Jessica said. “They didn’t have to check in as often as they do, and I really appreciate that.”

The stipend during the semester is also helpful for students. Being able to focus on academics ensures Members can get the most out of their programs.

“There are costs that you don’t really think about,” she added. “Then there are daycare costs, gas for commuting, textbooks...and so it helps with that too, and I’m just really grateful for that.”

Now equipped with two degrees, Jessica is ready to move forward in her career. She knows she owes a great deal to her family, who have been a constant support base.

“I just want to thank them for calling me every once in a while just making sure I’m okay,” Jessica said. “It’s so nice to hear from them and that they’re thinking about me.” ❖

Doris Wilkins-Wilt Joins Shako:wi Staff

The Oneida Indian Nation's Shako:wi Cultural Center welcomed Nation Member Doris Wilkins-Wilt (Wolf Clan) as its newest assistant in January. Doris is thrilled to be learning more about her culture and helping to inform others as well.

Among her many responsibilities, Doris will be trained on tours and presentations. She will be able to walk visitors through Shako:wi and answer any questions they may have. In addition to cultural projects, Doris will also manage the Shako:wi gift shop. In this role, she will process sales for visitors and serve as the gift shop's new buyer, adding offerings of authentic Native goods.

Between school visits and Turning Stone Enterprises team member orientations, there will be a lot of opportunities to inform and educate. It will be a big change from her previous jobs.

"I was the manager at Kraig's Kegs in Sherrill for almost five years and then I started working at the Maple Leaf Market in Verona as the night shift manager," Doris said.

Doris still works at Maple Leaf, but is excited to add a day job where she can absorb everything about Oneida culture.

"Outside of both of my jobs, I am still a single mother to seven young children who are really eager to learn just as I am," she said. "I'm looking forward to more projects and learning different ways to do things."

At Shako:wi, Nation Members and other American Indians can sign up for classes to learn how to bead, make moccasins, sew ribbon skirts and shirts, and much more. Jessica Farmer has added more classes that touch on a multitude of traditional Native skills.

It's all exciting for Doris, who will get to learn and teach alongside Jessica.

"I can make a no-face doll and I can make corn husk dolls," Doris said. "I also can make the Tuscarora beaded birds. I had two beaded birds that I entered into the New York State Fair Six Nations Agricultural Society Indian Village competitions in two different years and both placed with ribbons."

In 1997, Doris moved back to Oneida after living in Syracuse and Canastota. She remembers going to different classes at the Cultural Center and the Nation's Cookhouse.



"I still have my original language book," Doris reminisced.

"It's a whole different experience learning about the culture when you come here," she added. "When you are sitting in a classroom or shown pictures, you don't get that immersive experience. So that will hopefully help people get more interested and retain the knowledge that we give them."

Doris is excited to have local schools visit Shako:wi, too. Her daughter, Pamela, is going into fourth grade next year at the Oneida City School District, and it is clear to Doris there are still obstacles to challenging preconceived notions about American Indians.

"I've heard during my last presentation we had here, from a fourth grader, who wanted to know if there were real Indians still here," Doris said. "I get it, they're little kids and they only know what they are exposed to, but it's really alarming that it's still being asked. I'm proud that my daughter responds by saying 'I'm Indian,' but it's important to reinforce that we are still here."

It highlights the need to keep sharing Oneida and Haudenosaunee culture. It's all a learning experience, but Doris is eager to take it all on.

Since she started working at Shako:wi, Doris says she has found much peace.

"I'm sure most people would complain after working almost nine hours overnight and having to go work another eight-hour shift," Doris said. "I am actually upset I only get to come here three days a week. I don't think I have ever felt more at home as I do when I am here." ❖

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- Doris Wilkins-Wilt (Wolf Clan)