

# KAWENNÍ:IOS

*In this  
issue...*

**Wahta; Maple  
Pioneers of the Outdoors  
Denim Day**



**Kakwitè:ne | Spring 2025**

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## Chief's Note: Hope & Resilience, It's Who We Are



Photo contribution: Brittany Bonaparte

**Shé:kon Sewa'kwé:kon,**

I'm happy to welcome you to the the Spring Edition of Kawenní:ios. It is filled with stories, from cover to cover, about the important services provided by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe and the people who make it all possible. Tribal Council takes an oath at the beginning of each new term to ensure the health, welfare, safety and education of its members and the community of Akwesasne. A promise that we do not take lightly and could not achieve without the dedication and hard work of the employees of the Tribe. They take their responsibilities to heart as they are all our neighbors, friends, and relatives.

As with any leadership position, we face controversial matters on a political level within the community that keep us continually engaged in what we prefer to be solution-based discussions. At the same time, we must always be aware of external politics and the effects they may have on our people. Currently, a serious threat looms large over all of Indian Country.

We are currently working diligently to keep abreast of the quickly changing landscape in Washington, D.C. Forward-thinking leadership in the United States government has been replaced by an Administration that does not share our view of what stewardship of the land, air, and water looks like. They are threatening their own agencies with drastic cuts in personnel that could negatively impact services to our community owed in retribution for the occupation and taking of land and resources across Turtle Island. We are working along with other Tribal Nations to remind the Administration and Congress that Tribal Nations have a unique government-to-government political relationship with the U.S. We are not a special interest group, nor are we a race-based organization. With the help of national and regional native organizations like United South and Eastern Tribes (USET), National Indian Health Board (NIHB), National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), and our lobbyist groups, we are pushing back on policy changes that threaten Indian Health Services, the Affordable Care Act, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security that everyone has paid into over their lifetime. Our focus on border-related issues remains a priority as the U.S. focuses on the northern border regarding trade and border security.

Our greatest strength has always been our love for family and our children. We are still here as a people, not just out of sheer will but as a result of critical thinking and purposeful actions taken on behalf of future generations.

Caring for our own has always been a core value of Akwesasró:non. If an individual is struggling or battling an illness, or a family has suffered any type of loss, our people have rallied around to provide whatever assistance they can. Sometimes, it feels as though we are continually grieving. But when the opportunity arises, we also know how to celebrate triumphs, achievements, milestones, and each other. We are a resilient people, and even in the face of disagreements and adversity, we hopefully learn a lesson, grow from it, and find our way back to each other, like any family would.

Inside this edition of Kawenní:ios are articles highlighting initiatives and projects that are important to us. They are a few examples of hope and resilience building that make us who we are.

**Niawen:kówa | Thank you very much,  
Chief Beverly Cook**

# A Letter From the Parks & Recreation Program Manager, Amberdawn Lafrance

The Parks & Recreation Program is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the recreational areas that bring joy, health, and community spirit to our residents. As the manager of this excellent program, I am proud to introduce our team and highlight the incredible work we do.

Our team comprises of three dedicated Generations Park General Laborers: Matthew Smoke, Eric Sunday, and Harris Cole. Together, we ensure that all recreational facilities are well-maintained and ready for everyone to enjoy. Park staff works closely with other SRMT departments, such as the Facilities Maintenance Department, Environment Division, Planning & Infrastructure, Economic Development, and many others, to provide all the services needed to keep our facilities in top shape.



*Eric, Matt, Harris*

In addition to Generations Park, we have a new Amphitheater, which boasts a state-of-the-art stage, grass and shade seating, two multipurpose courts, two sand volleyball courts, and public restrooms. This 500-seat venue will be fully operational in mid-2025 and is expected to become a favorite spot for community events and performances.

One of our newest additions is the Kahrhaká:ion Nature Trail, built in 2024. Located next to the new SRMT Housing Development on Route 37, this 1.25-mile gravel trail winds through beautiful forested areas, offering a serene environment for peace, fresh air, and exercise. The walking trail is open year-round and is the premier destination for community events such as the Trail of Lights, Turkey Trot, Scavenger Hunts, and more!



*Amberdawn Lafrance*

In 2024, we hosted 473 events across Parks & Recreation facilities, with 178 dedicated to local sports leagues like lacrosse, flag football, soccer, and more. The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe organized 91 events, primarily through Health Services programs. Non-SRMT groups, businesses, and nonprofits held 165 events, including those by the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and lakwa'shatste Youth Fitness. Additionally, 39 private events like parties and meetings were organized by community members.



The statistic we are most proud to share is the total number of community members who participated in these events in 2024, which is 16,972! This is a significant number because it surpasses previous years' totals and does not include our visitors who stop by the park daily.

If you are interested in booking any areas of the Parks & Recreation Program facilities for your event, you can find all the information and details at [www.srmt-nsn.gov](http://www.srmt-nsn.gov) under "Generations Park." You can also find links to the application, updates, event announcements, and more on our Facebook and Instagram pages. If you have questions, email us directly at [generations.park@srmt-nsn.gov](mailto:generations.park@srmt-nsn.gov), call the office at (518) 358-9009, or message our Facebook page.

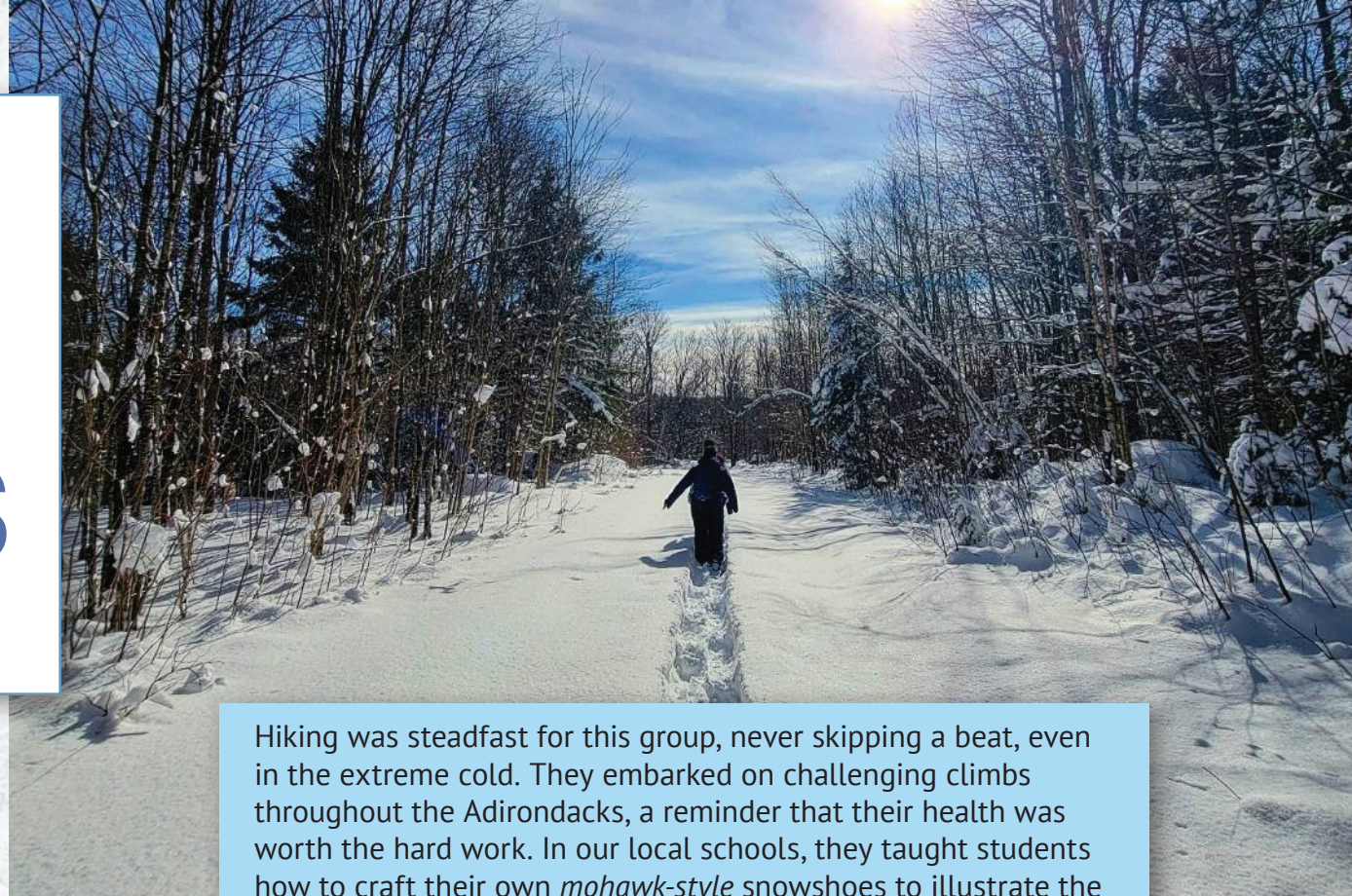


*Parks & Recreation Team*

The Parks & Recreation Program is committed to providing high-quality recreational facilities and experiences for the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe and the vibrant community of Akwesasne. We look forward to seeing you at our parks and events in 2025!

# PIONEERS OF THE OUTDOORS

By Katelynn Delormier, Communications Specialist



Hiking was steadfast for this group, never skipping a beat, even in the extreme cold. They embarked on challenging climbs throughout the Adirondacks, a reminder that their health was worth the hard work. In our local schools, they taught students how to craft their own *mohawk-style* snowshoes to illustrate the excitement that awaits outdoors, no matter the season.

While most people are peeling back on the extracurricular activities in favor of cozying up indoors, one group has turned it up a notch for winter.

**Iakwa'shatste Youth Fitness** Program coordinator, Annie Cree, has shared how they stay active in the winter and have fun. Whether it's partnering with local community groups, snowshoeing, or hiking, the cold didn't stop them from getting their move on.

Annie, in good company, set out to make the best of winter. "This year, one of my intentions was to connect my love of nature to more intentional healing spaces tied to our cultural teachings and self-experiences." She made good on her promise through "**Honoring Winter Solstice.**"

**Honoring Winter Solstice** aimed to celebrate the beauty of winter with the help of local community programs. They aimed to connect and share knowledge on rest, lighting personal fires, painting, and learning how to nourish our bodies depleted of much-needed vitamins and minerals.

To capture the essence of winter, she traveled frequently to watch the sun greet the day from the highest peaks our region offers. "**There is something about waking up that early to drive out and hike a mountain in the dark and sit there waiting for the sun, reflect on the last sunrise, or just to take a moment to stare out there. It helps clear your mind and thoughts; we need more of those moments, especially in winter.**"

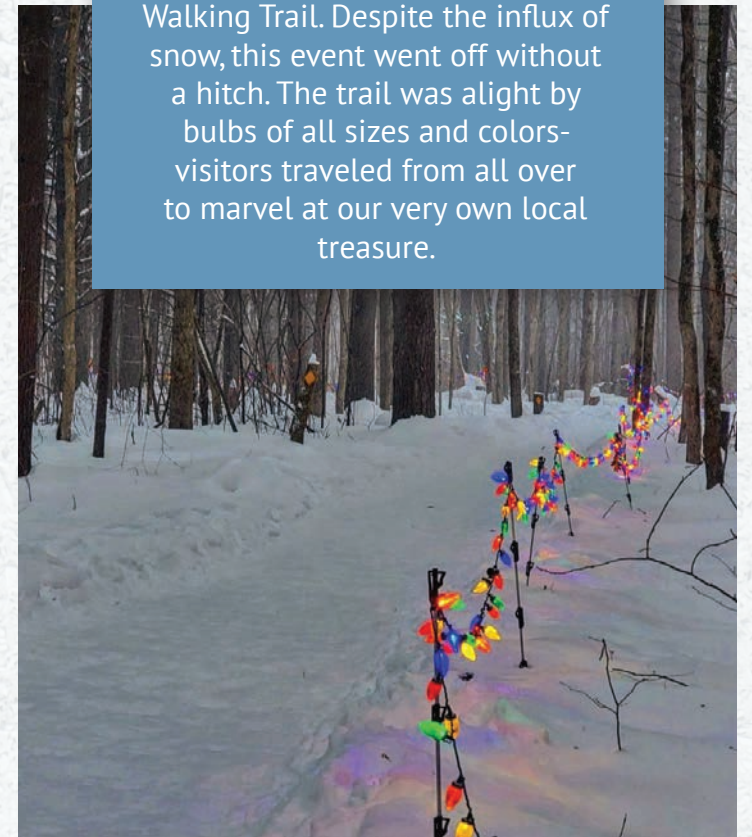


Looking ahead **Iakwa'shatste Youth Fitness** is excited for the Kids Running Club to prepare for the 2025 Ottawa Kids Marathon, the Enrichment Hiking series, paddle club, and a few new fun programs coming soon. Follow their social media to receive updates on their programming and how you can join in on the fun!

Photo contributions: Annie Cree



Akwesasne's inaugural "Trail of Lights" at the new Kahrhaká:ion Walking Trail. Despite the influx of snow, this event went off without a hitch. The trail was alight by bulbs of all sizes and colors- visitors traveled from all over to marvel at our very own local treasure.



Open-fire cooking is preparing meals over an open flame. Their group traveled throughout Adirondacks and set up camp to study this ancient cooking style. They created delicious and safely prepared meals using cast iron pans, foil packs, and traditional clay pots.



# THE "WAHTA" MAPLE TREES ARE BACK

By Katelynn Delormier, Communications Specialist

The **maple** or "**wahta**" is the first tree varietal to wake after a long winter, signaling to the rest that warmer weather is coming. With the promise of incoming warmth, maple trees produce a sweet liquid called sap that travels throughout the tree, transporting vital nutrients and sugar that aid in jumpstarting the process of photosynthesis.

Tapping can begin before chlorophyll production occurs, or when the sap turns from clear to amber. This period generally lasts a few weeks, when the temperature jumps from cold to a thaw. The buckets of sweet sap are harvested to create maple syrup— a common ingredient in many tasty treats and confections. Our ancestors used maple sap to replenish lost nutrients after the long winter months. In its natural form, this sap is rich in minerals, antioxidants, and polyphenols.



One family carrying on the traditional practice of maple tapping is introducing a unique experience to a broader audience, through a collaboration with **Akwesasne Travel**. **Tyson Back** gives an exclusive look into tapping, collecting, and boiling sap into the precious and tasty final product. At the home he shares with his wife **Kelly** and their children, Tyson taps trees around their expansively wooded property— a perfect landscape for various maple species to thrive. The two prominent varieties of maple located at the Back family compound are **sugar maples *acer saccharum*** and **red maple *acer rubrum***. When asked about the differences in flavor profile among the two trees, Tyson shares, "***Sugar maples are known for their sugar content. They produce a higher sugar content sap that tends to run earlier. When it's cold like this, they run really good.***"

Tyson carries on teachings he learned from tapping trees with his father and uncles in his younger years. Armed with the wisdom and tools inherited from his grandfather, he's extending this unique and cultural experience to maple enthusiasts and outdoorspeople. To see firsthand the progression of the tree tapping process, stay tuned to **Akwesasne Travel's** social channels for an announcement when this exclusive and one-of-a-kind experience launches!



# AKWESASNE COMIC-CON



**FOOD • FUN • GAMES • LENA THE LIZARD LADY • ITEMS FOR SALE  
ALL COMIC FANS WELCOMED!**

**MARCH, 2025**

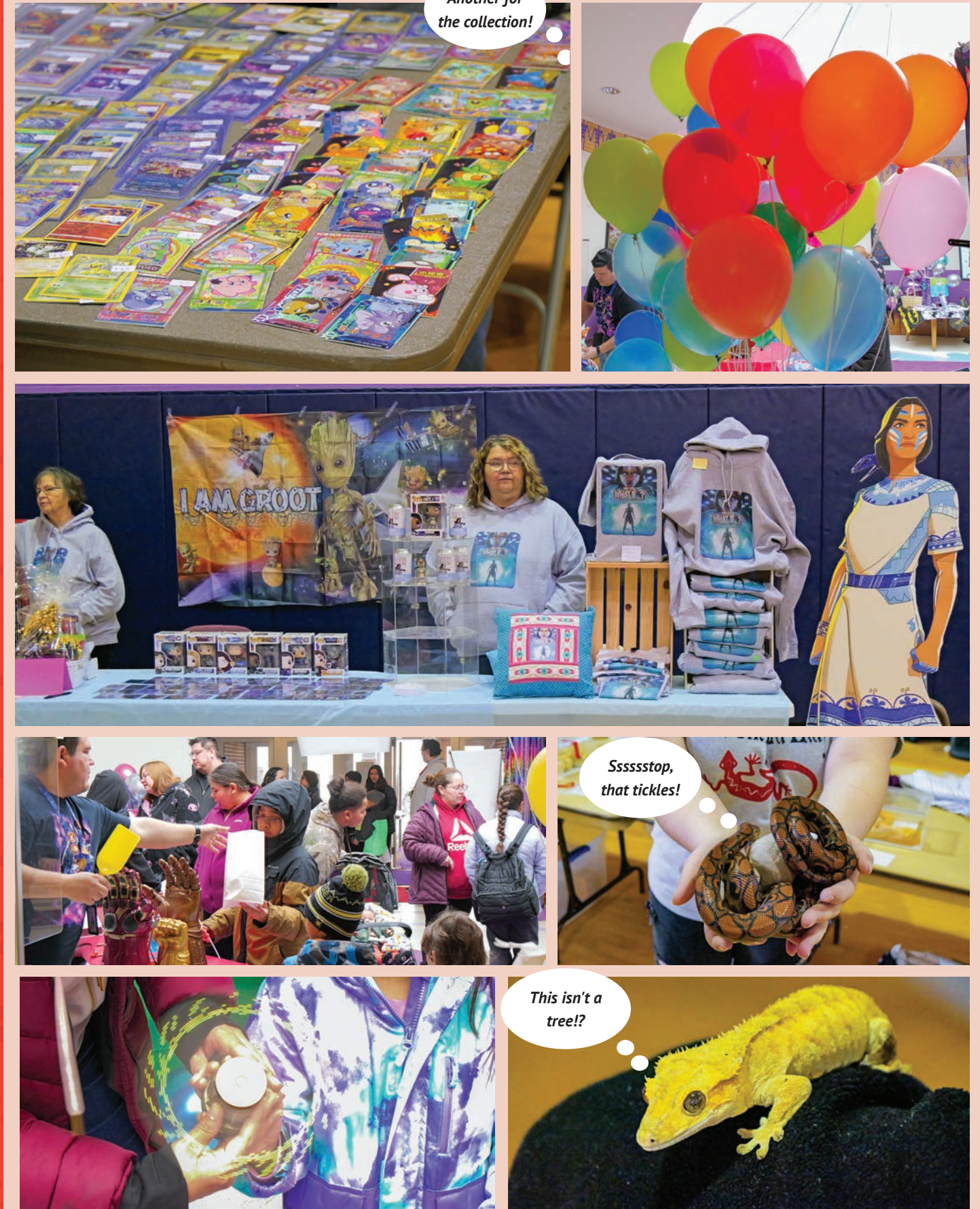




Photo contribution: Madison Breen

# Nation-to-Nation Food Sustainability Conference

By Madison Breen, Communications Officer

The Nation-to-Nation Food Sustainability Conference, organized by Onkwe in partnership with the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, and Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, took place on March 8th and 9th. This gathering celebrated the traditions and connectivity of the Onkwehonwe, or Original People, and included attendees from various tribal nations and environmental programs.



The conference began by emphasizing the importance of food sustainability within Indigenous communities. A communal breakfast was provided consisting of mush, fruits, and nuts, with discussions about health and wellness were initiated. The pride of the Onkwehonwe was present, and the deep connections through generations and the commitment to planning for future generations were highlighted.

With 160 participants registered, the focus was on discussing issues with local food sourcing and encouraging a return to traditional gardening practices. The ideas of sustainability were reinforced, stating that it is a collective effort that involves the entire Onkwehonwe community. The conference underscored the essential role of food in shaping identity and culture. Throughout the event, the seven generations present shared stories, seeds, and traditions, engaging in meaningful discussions about the importance of food sustainability. Attendees discussed the issues in their respective communities to figure out solutions rather than simply acknowledging them.



*“I hope to build better relationships and connections with anyone who attended. Not only our group but also our community, to unite and feed ourselves with the skills we can share with the neighboring communities and nations.”*  
- Jessica Shannandoah, Onkwe

Photo contributions: Austin Herne

Key topics included the best times to plant vegetables according to moon phases, the challenges posed by black walnut trees to other vegetation, optimal watering practices, and the introduction of traditional growing methods that fostered a deeper relationship with the ever-increasing practices. Workshops on berm composting and rainwater collection were offered alongside discussions about sustainable practices like mushroom farming and cross-pollination.

Thoughts and discussions to extend collaboration efforts to northern tribes such as the Cree and Ojibwe Nations, could provide opportunities and agreements to grow and share saplings. Additionally, information was provided on sourcing black ash logs for community basket making and again emphasizing the importance of food and its sources. Participants were reminded to nurture their plants, as living beings respond positively to care. Overall, the conference was a powerful testament to the strength of the community and the vital connection between food, identity, and sustainability.

Many presenters gathered during the Food Sustainability Conference and Food Swap to spread their knowledge of different topics. One presenter was Neil Patterson of the Tuscarora Nation. Neil Patterson is the Executive Director at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. He covered the cultural significance of planting and seasonal bits standard within the Haudenosaunee Nation during his presentation. One thing that stuck with many of the participants was the plants and vegetation that are being threatened by climate change. Across Turtle Island, Indigenous communities are facing a threat at unprecedented levels to typical vegetation that can be used as a medicine for traditions within ceremonies; some of the vegetation that is commonly issued within Mohawk culture that can be threatened are Sweetgrass, Strawberries, Black Ash, and Sugar Maple.

There were also community members and advocates who provided information on sustainability and sourcing food from a local standpoint. McKay Burley, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's Plant Nurse Technician, provided information on sustainable practices of rainwater harvesting; Janice Brant provided information on Seed Saving, "Turk" Jock provided details on creating your pod; and lastly, Jasmine Jimerson and Levi Herne provided information on restoring an Onkwehonwehá ecosystems.

*Niawen:kówa, to all the incredible Onkwehonwe who came together to put on this event.*





# SEVEN LEAF & O:TSIRE— INNOVATION AT THE FRONTLINES OF A BLOOMING CANNABIS INDUSTRY

By Katelynn Delormier, Communications Specialist

Quickly learning the ropes while the political tides were turning in 2018, he climbed the ranks, now leading the charge to develop procedures and deliver exceptional quality cannabis. He shares, "Working at Seven Leaf is a chance to make a real impact. It's not just about our product; it's about the relationships we're building through providing First Nations with safe and quality cannabis. It's a hands-on learning experience that goes beyond clocking in and out— it's about real growth, both personally and as a company." His story is one of many others that illustrates the wealth of opportunity available to those passionate about a rewarding career in the cannabis industry.

Through rigorous testing and strict protocols, Seven Leaf is leading the way in evolutionary cannabis cultivation. Each batch is scrutinized utilizing a third-party accredited laboratory to determine cannabinoids, terpenes, heavy metals, pesticides, and microbiological abnormalities. For every passing test, Seven Leaf receives an official COA (Certificate of Analysis) from the lab, confirming quality and adherence to testing requirements. To curb the use of harmful chemicals, they employ the use of "beneficial insects," a non-toxic and eco-friendly alternative to pest control, creating a healthy and balanced ecosystem for plants to thrive. With tested, tried, and true techniques, Seven Leaf has cultivation down to an exact science. Each team, from fertigation, sanitation, and packaging, works in synergy to craft products that strike the perfect balance of exceptional quality and taste.

In the earlier years of its operation, Seven Leaf navigated the challenges of a rapidly evolving landscape. Under Health Canada's Cannabis legislation, it faced high licensing fees and restricted collaboration with First Nation communities, including ours. Dedicated to breaking barriers, Seven Leaf acquired a Mohawk Council of Akwesasne Cannabis Cultivation license, allowing nation-to-nation trading to blossom.

As the industry rapidly develops, safeguarding youth is of utmost importance. Responsible advertisement is a non-negotiable as Seven Leaf sets the standard through its mindful marketing efforts. This includes carefully selecting typography, use of color, and steering clear of character use that appeals to youth. Seven Leaf supports the Strong Roots North Charitable Foundation, whose projects improve the safety and well-being of youth and elders in the community of Akwesasne. Social responsibility goes beyond best marketing practices; it extends to its profound and lasting impact on future generations.

Seven Leaf is hard at work to expand its operations with the goal of becoming one of the largest cannabis cultivation facilities among First Nations in Canada.

Through the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's Cannabis licensing, O:tsire hopes to do the same on the southern portion of the territory.

Spearheading quality assurance throughout this endeavor will be Owen, leading the charge to strengthen O:tsire's presence in the NYS Tribal market. O:tsire has the opportunity to leverage in-house brands "Sparkd" and an upcoming cannabis line called "Fat Packs," suitable for seasoned connoisseurs and budding beginners alike. Along with local favorites, O:tsire acquired rights to manufacture and distribute popular national brands including "Cookies," "Sherbinskis," and "Bodega Boyz" here in Akwesasne.

Through innovation, indigenous owned companies Seven Leaf and O:tsire, are redefining what it means to be a leader in a flourishing cannabis industry. They remain dedicated to producing the highest quality cannabis while creating opportunities for entrepreneurs and aspiring horticulturists to explore an exciting alternative career path. Here is where the standard for cultivation, community development, and social responsibility extends beyond business; it's cannabis with a purpose.

Seven Leaf is redefining a flourishing industry through innovation, cultivation, and community development. As benefactors of a sustainable economy, they are investing in our local workforce by building capacity and forging relationships with budding First Nation communities.

Capacity building is a key pillar of Seven Leaf's strategic plan to create employment in the industry, exemplified by Owen Mitchell, Seven Leaf's Quality Assurance Officer. Owen joined Seven Leaf pre-covid as a Quality Assurance Specialist, coming from a career in environmental conservation. In collaboration with industry experts, he earned accreditation as one of the first Indigenous Quality Assurance Person's through Health Canada.







# Calling All Aspiring Mohawk Medical Professionals!

**By Haley Cree, ARCH Student Enhancement Coordinator**

Do you dream of advancing the health and wellness of your community? Is a career in the medical field calling your name? The Akwesasne Research Center for Health (ARCH) is actively recruiting for the Summer 2025 cohort. If you have a passion for advancing cutting-edge cancer research, this program is for you.

The ARCH Program, a collaboration between Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Health Services and Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, offers paid internship opportunities to college and high school students interested in careers in health research.

Roswell Park is New York State's only National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center outside of NYC that delivers cutting-edge technology and surgical approaches. The work of the professionals at Roswell promises new drugs and immunotherapies for cancer patients, as well as the latest cellular and gene therapy breakthroughs for treating various cancers. Students are mentored by internationally renowned scientists conducting research with the goal of completing their research projects to present to peers, mentors, and their teams.

Former scholars who have participated at Roswell through the ARCH program rave about the benefits of being in close proximity to groundbreaking cancer research and the vast opportunities, "Diving into cancer research during this program has definitely made me want to engage more and bring awareness to my community." Many scholars also share that research was an essential aspect of the program, but so were the friends made along the way, "Being able to connect with my peers and mentors in a way I never thought I would. I made so many friends here."

In addition to the connections and exciting high-caliber environment, students have the opportunity for their work to be published in scientific journals and are recruited for recurring internship work. Some have obtained employment with Roswell and are continuing graduate studies and medical school. The program has also recruited high schoolers into higher education where previously they showed no interest.

This opportunity requires equal parts heart and hustle. As we understand the effort it takes to pursue, we have multiple resources to ensure students feel empowered to explore and complete valiant work. SRMT Education Division Director Stephanie Cook shares, "The summer internship experience at Roswell Park is a tremendous opportunity for our Mohawk youth to gain valuable life skills, learn about teamwork and collaboration, and help them explore potential career pathways in the STEM field. Our amazing team supports them during their internship to ensure their success."



SRMT resident assistants accompany the high schoolers in Buffalo, and Roswell Park's team is readily available for support. For the protection of our students, Canisius College provides 24/7 security while staying on campus.

There is ample opportunity through the ARCH Program to enhance your skills and create new ones. Your participation will advance cancer research and create a healthy Akwesasne. For more information on the program or to apply, please email Haley Cree, Student Enhancement Coordinator, at [haleycree@srmt-nsn.gov](mailto:haleycree@srmt-nsn.gov). The deadline to apply for an internship through ARCH is March 31, 2025, but applications may be accepted on a rolling basis if spots are still available.

# Kakhwíio Atekhwahráhne- Good Food on the Table

**By Madison Breen, Communications Officer**

"Food Connects Us" is the theme of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics National Nutrition Month® in 2025. Food is a universal language that cuts through cultural divides and unites diverse communities. These traditions not only nourish the body but also tell a story of heritage, resilience, and connection.

Our connections with food start from a young age; often, we see how food is prepared with our families, with recipes that have been passed down for generations. As we grow older, we often find connections with food in other ways. When we travel, we try the local delicacies. We also have foods that we enjoy in moments of happiness or comfort ourselves with when we're feeling down.



Photo contribution: Madison Breen

Food is not only for nourishment; it is a vital part of cultural identity and tradition. Meals are often shared communally in any culture. Traditional dishes carry stories and memories, passed down through generations, keeping our cultures alive.

When thinking of maintaining healthy lifestyles and our traditional meals, many local food vendors combine traditions and put a creative spin on them. Adapting traditional recipes to fit modern lifestyles while honoring their origins. This revival goes beyond food; it is a reclamation of identity, a celebration of Indigenous knowledge, and a commitment to preserving the land. Creating traditional meals such as corn soup, fry-bread, cornbread and using traditional ingredients such as corn, squash, and beans can make a healthy combination for nutrients and tasty meals that also look beautiful.



*Embracing culinary tradition, honor the past but also develop a better understanding and respect for the unique cultures that make up our communities and our families. In sharing meals with loved ones, we can often find common ground or the root of how food truly connects us all.*



Photo contributions: Austin Herne

# CHIEF BEVERLY COOK: A SEAT AT THE TABLE

By Katelynn Delormier, Communications Specialist

Chief Beverly Kiohawiton Cook's place is set at the table of *The Dinner Party*, a reimagined rendition of Judy Chicago's famous installation. Cook's setting features an expertly crafted plate and cup by potter Sue Burdick Young and a tapestry cloth creation by Amy Pennington-Lee.

Judy Chicago's original *The Dinner Party* installation was an influential feminist art piece of the 1970s, an homage to important women throughout history. The installation featured a banquet-style triangular dinner table with place settings inspired by 39 remarkable and impactful women. Inscribed on the floor tiles were the names of an additional 999 prominent female figures.

For the 2025 *The Dinner Party* rendition, Sue Burdick Young drew inspiration from Tribal Chief Beverly Cook, currently serving her 4th term. Through her early work as a nurse and midwife, Cook taught and worked closely with women through all stages of life. Most notably, she shared an important message about inheriting generational trauma through the mother's mitochondrial DNA:

"While baby girls are in utero, they have developed all the eggs they will need in their lifetime after birth, reinforcing the message of caring for oneself during this most critical period."

Young sought to reproduce these themes by casting Cook's hands in the center as a focal point. In between her hands are seven eggs, representing the next generations that we keep in mind when making important decisions. The design between her arms comes from Cook's father, Julius Cook, who was an iron worker. It is called the "Life Ring" after the crucial elements that sustain

the elements of creation. It is representative of the sun, which provides energy and life. The mountains represent the timber, watersheds, and beauty in the world. The clouds and lightning offer the essential sustenance for the three sisters, corn, beans, and squash, to thrive. The sky dome design around the top of the bowl signifies the celestial tree of life, sacred tobacco leaves, and the connection to the Creator and Sky Woman.

Young's piece consists of clay collected from the banks of the St. Lawrence River and fired in a pit composed of wood, sawdust, and tobacco. Accompanying Young's masterful pottery is Pennington-Lee's tapestry "Circles and Cycles" tying the place setting together. Pennington-Lee's piece depicts the moon phases in honor of Grandmother Moon who is responsible for the tides "of both earth and womb," the sky in the middle that serves as a nod to Sky Woman, corn, grasses and the winds intentionally placed in a circular arrangement to represent the interconnectedness and continuation of these most precious elements.

*The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago Reimagined* is on display at the St. Lawrence County Art Council in Potsdam, New York, until March 26th, with a special reception.



Created by: Sue Burdick Young

***"The celestial sky domes represent the sky world and all of creation here and that which is beyond our earth. The domes represent our connection with the Creator and Sky Woman who came on this earth and gave it great life.***

***The domes also remind us that we are a part of all creation and that we should obey the laws of nature." -Julius Cook***



# EARTH DAY TREE & SEED GIVEAWAY



SAT April 26, 2025



9am - 12pm



Travis Solomon Lacrosse box

Join the Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment, and the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Environment Division for our annual giveaway and Earth Day celebration! Connect with an environmentally conscious audience and help cultivate a greener future.



SAINT REGIS MOHAWK TRIBE  
ENVIRONMENT

## REVOLUTIONARY WALLEYE eDNA RESEARCH: WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SPECIES

BY SPENCER ALASCIO, WATER RESOURCES PROGRAM AQUATIC BIOLOGIST



Skakahra'ksen, commonly known in English as the "walleye," is one of the St. Regis River's most treasured fish. In a 2023 angling survey conducted by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's Water Resources Program, bass, walleye, and perch were identified as the (3) major fish species commonly sought by anglers. Fish species face a host of environmental impacts. These include habitat degradation via pollution, channel dredging, shoreline development, changing climactic conditions, invasive species and total angling pressure. With this in mind, finding effective, restorative, and sustainable ways to maintain and strengthen the walleye population is critical.

The SRMT Water Resources Program has pioneered an alternative approach to track walleye spawning grounds throughout the St. Regis River and enter the Walleye eDNA project. This revolutionary project will track walleye spawning locations and assess their habitat restoration needs. We know walleye prefer shallow riffles over coarse, rocky substrate, but they are not always so picky. What is eDNA? Genetic material in the environment, otherwise known as eDNA, has been a promising and rapidly improving field of study which allows scientists to reliably detect the presence and absence of species within bodies of water. In more recent years, studies have shown a reliable relationship between the concentration of eDNA and the relative abundance of a fish species.

This innovative research will begin in the spring, immediately following the ice-out. The Water Resources Program's technical team will raft down the 20-mile stretch of the St. Regis River. At every 1-mile interval, water samples will be collected throughout the entirety of the river, starting at the Brasher Falls and ending where the St. Regis River meets the St. Lawrence River. The samples will be filtered to collect the needed eDNA to test for walleye. The goal is two-fold: to capture the seasonal pulse of walleye abundance in the tributary as they migrate, and to identify preferred spawning locations based on relative eDNA concentration between sites.

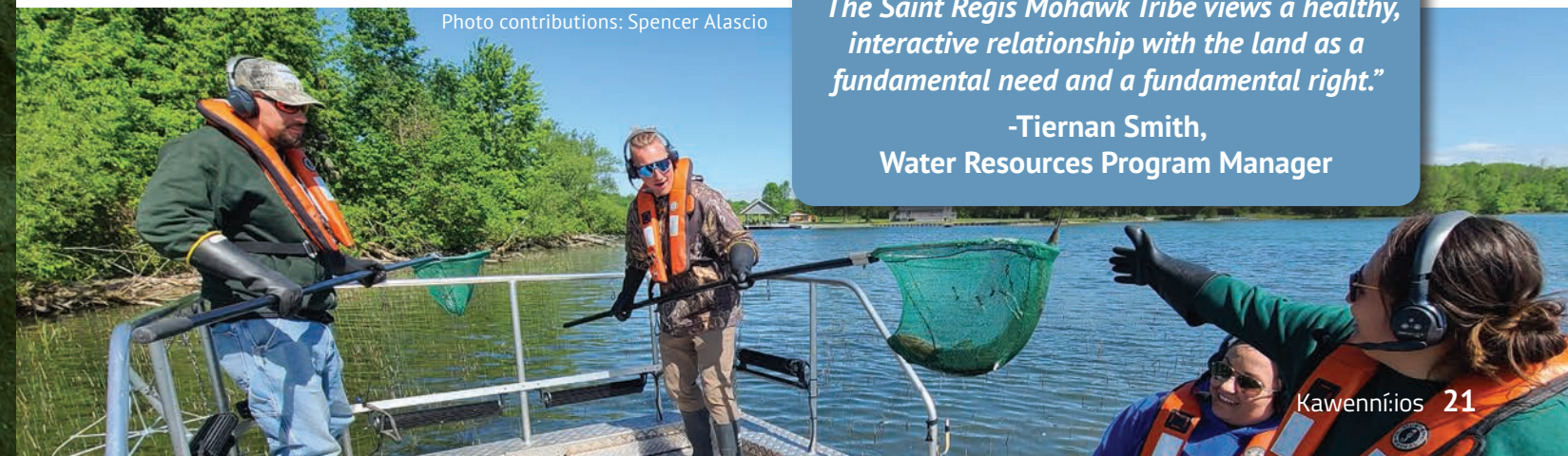
While we have not yet established a link between a specific concentration of eDNA and a specific number of fish, there is strong evidence we can estimate the abundance of fish in one location relative to the abundance of fish in another location based on eDNA concentration within the same time frame. eDNA also allows us to track the movement of walleye within the context of the 2016 Hogsburg Dam Removal, tracking if their migration has continued to expand further upstream into the restored watershed.

Successful completion of this project will give us the necessary information to further our efforts to protect and preserve the walleye populations for years to come. Additionally, this research will identify next steps to address community concerns for the fish populations in the St. Regis River by using methods not yet explored by conservation science. Once our initial research is complete and we compile the eDNA data collected, we will share our findings with the community. Until next time!

Photo contributions: Spencer Alascio

*"The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe views a healthy, interactive relationship with the land as a fundamental need and a fundamental right."*

-Tiernan Smith,  
Water Resources Program Manager



# Why We Wear Denim on April 23rd

By Katelynn Delormier, Communications Specialist


In 1992, a sexual assault case involving an 18-year-old girl and her 45-year-old driving instructor sparked global outrage. During her very first driving lesson, the instructor led her to an isolated road, forced her out of the vehicle and sexually assaulted her. The victim reported the crime to Italian authorities, and the perpetrator was later arrested and sentenced to jail.

After winning the appeal in 1999, the disgraced driving instructor was released. The Italian High Court's ruling was based on the argument that the young girl's jeans were too tight and would have needed her to help remove them— thus implying consent. Enraged by the news, the women of Parliament protested on the steps of the Supreme Court by wearing jeans, inspiring an international and award-winning campaign to fight against the misconceptions surrounding sexual violence.

On a national level, it is estimated that about 310 out of 1,000 sexual assault cases are reported to authorities. Unreported cases of sexual assault fly under the radar for many reasons. "Despite all the education and awareness about sexual assault, there are still a lot of misconceptions and stigma. Victims fear they won't be believed, that they will be blamed, they'll face judgment and criticism from the community, and intimidation during the court process. This is especially true in small communities, such as Akwesasne," shares Community Advocacy Program Manager Michelle Cook. Though there are many services available to victims and survivors through the Tribe, there's still a long way to go.

To end the negative stigma surrounding sexual violence, the community is invited to participate in **Denim Day on Wednesday, April 23, 2025**, as part of Sexual Violence Awareness Month. You can join by wearing your denim, encouraging open dialog with your peers, and shopping at participating businesses. Share how you support the movement on social media by using the hashtag **#DenimDayAkwesasne**. Together, we can eliminate sexual violence and end the negative stigma surrounding victims of sexual assault, ultimately creating an environment that is safer for our community.

For more information on **'Denim Day,'** or if you need support, please get in touch with the **Community Advocacy Program** at **(518) 358-4406** or by emailing **CAP@srmt-nsn.gov**.



**DENIM  
DAY  
AKWESASNE**

# Tribal Gaming Commission

## 25 Years of Excellence

By Jill Benedict

For 25 years, the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Gaming Commission (TGC) has promoted fairness and upheld the integrity of the gaming operation, setting the standard for regulatory excellence. This milestone reflects the employees' dedication who've contributed to its success.

As we celebrate this incredible achievement, we honor the individuals and departments whose hard work and commitment have sustained our operations.

### *Reflecting on 25 Years of Progress*

As we reflect on the last quarter-century, it's remarkable to see how far we've come. From the foundational days with simpler systems to today's tech-powered operations, our journey has been one of adaptation and growth.

Advancements in technology have been key to this evolution. What started with simpler systems has grown to include electronic gaming, cashless payments, and advanced surveillance. The Commission has adapted by implementing verification protocols and compliance standards to ensure these innovations meet regulatory requirements.



Executive Director, TGC



This incredible journey would not have been possible without our team. Among our 47 current employees, 13 have worked in gaming for 25 years or more. They demonstrate a deep commitment to upholding integrity and driving progress. Their institutional knowledge and dedication have been pivotal in navigating the challenges of a constantly evolving industry.

### *The Role of each Department*

Over the past 25 years, the Commission has served as the regulatory backbone of gaming, ensuring compliance with regulations. From humble beginnings to the thriving organization it is today, the Commission has worked tirelessly to uphold its responsibilities. Each Commission department plays a crucial role in fulfilling this mission, from the inspectors, surveillance, internal audit, licensing, and the gaming network. Together, these departments work collaboratively to protect gaming integrity and ensure the continued success of the gaming operation.

### *Looking to the Future*

As we celebrate this milestone, we also look ahead with optimism. The gaming industry will continue to evolve, and the Commission remains committed to embracing innovation. From integrating emerging technologies to navigating new regulatory landscapes, the next 25 years promise both challenges and opportunities.

This celebration honors our past achievements and the strong foundation we've built while eagerly anticipating the future.



Tribal Gaming Commission

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JURIED ART SHOW



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AKWESASNE  
ART MARKET

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## Experience



Mohawk Art & Culture  
Live Entertainment & Demonstrations  
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Experience Akwesasne!  
MOHAWK TERRITORY

# 2025 Staff Enrichment Award Winners



Sandy Benedict,  
Home Improvement  
Program Manager



Colleen Thomas,  
Director of Planning  
& Infrastructure



Hawie Benedict  
Chronic Care Home Health Aide



Courtney Jacobs, Betty Roundpoint &  
Jodi Jackson,  
Administrative Professionals for EDO



Lori Michaud,  
Caseworker for  
Adult Protection Services

# Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Awards Over \$1 Million to Akwesasne Non-Profit Organizations for Fiscal Year 2025

By Jori Rourke, Chief of Staff

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT) recognizes the important and impactful work performed by non-governmental entities within the Akwesasne community each year. The Tribe has for many years contributed from the Tribal General Fund to such organizations that have demonstrated significant positive impact to the health, welfare, safety and education of community members. The Tribal General Fund are those funds derived from Tribal enterprises such as Mohawk Gaming Enterprise and from fees collected from tobacco, alcohol, and petroleum by Tribally-licensed businesses.

The Tribal Council is proud to share the 2025 recipients of Community Support Programming Funds. Please join us in congratulating the following recipients of the Community Support Program funding for Fiscal Year 2025:

**Akwesasne Boys and Girls Club - \$455,000**  
**Akwesasne Cultural Center - \$60,000**  
**Haudenosaunee Everlasting Academy of Learning - \$100,000**  
**Holistic Life Foundation - Akwesasne - \$150,000**  
**Seven Dancers Coalition - \$193,089**  
**Sewakwatho, Recovery Drop-In Center - \$108,236**  
**Onkwe, Inc. - to be announced**

As many of our community members understand, the COVID-19 pandemic has set back Tribal General Fund revenues. The Fiscal Year 2025 Community Support Programming funding was made possible through the last remaining federal stimulus funds known as the Local Assistance Tribal Consistency Fund ("LATCF")—a general revenue enhancement program in which Congress reserved \$500 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for eligible tribal governments and counties to provide flexible support to meet the needs of respective communities.

The statute for LATCF directs that recipients may use funds for any governmental purpose (other than a lobbying activity). While the Tribe received American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funds previously, it came with a restriction deadline to expend or obligate ARPA funds by December 31, 2024. The Tribal Council in consultation with the Executive Director's Office and Chief Financial Officer determined it in the best interest of the Tribe to reserve LATCF for use after the ARPA deadline for FY 2025 budget support.

In 2024, during the process for the Fiscal Year 2025 Tribal Government Budget, the Tribe's Budget Team was tasked with filling funding gaps left by the absence of ARPA funding to support the Tribe's \$143 million operating budget. One of the areas of the Tribe's budget that was in need of budget support, is the Tribe's Community Support Program, with the main mission to financially assist Akwesasne non-profit organizations and groups working within the community to provide services to promote health, welfare, safety, and education.

## **Community Support recipients are required to adhere to following funding conditions:**

- Submit an annual expenditure report to certify that funds are properly utilized in accordance with funding proposal;
- Maintain records and financial documents for five (5) years after all funds have been expended;
- Return any unspent funds to the Tribe by Enniskó:wa/March 31, 2026;
- Express positive messages acknowledging the Tribe's support, submit and permit relevant photos for the Tribe's use;
- Present at monthly Tribal meetings upon request.

The Tribe is grateful for the LATCF that made it possible to continue the Community Support Program funding and is proud to share that a total of \$1,066,325.00 was disbursed to Akwesasne non-profit organizations for Fiscal Year 2025.

In addition, the Community Support Program financially supports the Heating Assistance Program, budgeted at \$2.32 million annually; the Akwesasne Streetlight Safety Initiative; Community Advocacy Program's Winter Jacket Program; cemetery upkeep; and Medical Hardship for Alternative or Non-Covered Care. Since the Tribe's Elders Benefit Program approved revenue sources do not meet the current needs of the program, \$720,000 is budgeted to ensure recipients receive the full benefit of \$2,400 this year.

While fiscal challenges remain ahead, the Tribe continues to work to find creative and novel solutions to assist important and impactful non-governmental organizations within Akwesasne.



Photo contribution: Austin Herne

# Seven Dancers, Standing the Community Back Up

By Madison Breen, Communications Officer



Photo contribution: Austin Herne

The **Seven Dancers Coalition** is a non-profit organization that seeks to strengthen familial relationships and individual self-confidence, dignity, and spirituality by restoring traditional cultural values and providing an environment of peace and tranquility to promote healing for survivors of violence. The **Seven Dancers Coalition** uses culturally-grounded approaches for the prevention of and response to domestic violence and sexual assault offers a unique blend of traditional and modern approaches to heal the mind, body, and spirit.

The **Coalition** offers a range of programs tailored to specific age groups and gender, ensuring that all members of the community have the opportunity to learn, grow, and heal.

#### **The Seven Dancers Coalition Programming includes:**

- **Sapling to Cedars for Youth Boys:** Fostering growth and resilience among young boys.
- **Standing the Trees Back Up Men's Program:** Offering a culturally sensitive space for men.
- **Strawberry Seedling Youth Girls Program:** Empowering young girls with knowledge and strength.
- **Seeds of Resilience:** Supporting those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, teen dating issues, stalking, and sex trafficking.

Through these programs, the **Coalition** provides support for those affected by violence and imparts a strength-based approach to promoting resilience. Programs also help identify ways that modern society has disrupted cultural values and gender roles and driven families and communities apart as a result. Participants can gain a deeper connection with their cultural and personal identity, as well as their roles and responsibilities within the family and community contexts, and learn about practices for healthier family and interpersonal relationships.

June is recognized as Men's Health Month, and the **Seven Dancers Coalition** is dedicated to supporting the men of Akwesasne. Harvey Herne, the director of the **Standing the Trees Back Up Program**, uses a practical, holistic approach to engaging men and challenging maladaptive perceptions and behaviors. Herne integrates didactic instruction with culturally-based practices such as the medicine wheel, sweat lodges, and talking circles to remind participants of the wisdom and value of traditional ways of knowing.

The **Seven Dancers Coalition** in Akwesasne is more than just a support network; it is a beacon of cultural revitalization and personal empowerment. The **Coalition** continues to pave the way for a healthier, more connected community through its comprehensive programs. For more information, contact Amie Barnes, Executive Director, or Harvey Herne, Men's Program Manager, at (518) 358-2916 or email [amie@seven-dancers.com](mailto:amie@seven-dancers.com) or [harvey@seven-dancers.com](mailto:harvey@seven-dancers.com). The **Seven Dancers Coalition** is located at 1569 NY Route 37 and is open M-F: 8:00am-4:30pm.







# National Police Week

By Mose Herne, Acting Director of Communications

In recognition of **National Police Week**, we sat down and had a conversation with Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Police Chief Matthew Rourke to learn more about policing activities in Akwesasne. Our conversation focused on recent improvements in the department and accomplishments despite challenges of historically limited resources and growing demand for increasingly complex law enforcement and border response.

Police Chief Rourke spoke proudly of the growth of the department and particularly about the level of education and experience of current police officers now serving the Akwesasne community. In the past, officers typically joined the force with high school diplomas

or GEDs; however, currently many officers hold associate's, bachelor's, and even master's degrees. The department also encourages and prioritizes local candidates with ties to the community to apply, adding to the best practice of community-oriented policing, discussed later in this article.

The proportion of female and veteran officers has also been increasing, which Police Chief Rourke says adds to the capability and range of expertise in the department. Although candidates are not required to complete the civil service exam, which Rourke says contributes to flexibility in hiring and timely onboarding, officers have done very well in academy testing— one performing at the top of the class and ahead

of other candidates who had legal training. Overall, these trends with current officers are consistent with modern, community-oriented policing services.

Although the Police department consists of only 28 officers, Police Chief Rourke says there are advantages of working in a smaller department. He observes a close-knit relationship among his officers and a strong sense of teamwork. Rourke expressed a high level of confidence in his officers, sharing that he believes they can perform just as well, if not better, than officers in many other larger police departments. Rourke says he hopes to expand the Police force structure to include specialized unit like criminal intelligence teams and anti-terrorism task

forces, which would require additional resources from federal funding agencies.

## Fostering Partnerships

Chief Rourke spoke at length about the importance of partnerships particularly as they relate to cross-border initiatives. He works closely with federal agencies such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), as well as the New York State Police (NYSP) and Akwesasne Mohawk Police Services (AMPS), to address important challenges from illegal border crossings of individuals that threaten public safety and human and drug trafficking, to emergency response on our waterways. These partnerships have resulted in the seizure of significant amounts of illegal drugs and weapons, arrests of dangerous individuals crossing the border, and water rescues of people in dire need of assistance. Cooperation has extended to emergency medical transportation services where ambulances now follow a streamlined process to cross the border without delay. Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVA) occurring on territory straddling the border are communicated and coordinated quickly due to open lines of communication established through partnerships. Special arrangements have been made for funerals that require family members to cross the border for services, demonstrating compassion for the death of

community members and respect for cultural practices. Regular cross-border meetings take place quarterly that strengthen these relationships and cultural awareness training videos are required for new CBP and CBSA officers, as well as interested NYSP officers.



Bob Dwyer, Massena Port Director, U.S. CBP, Matt Rourke, Tribal Police Chief, and Tracy Casey, Chief Customs & Border Protection Officer

Rourke suggests recruiting local officers from the territory adds a dimension to border security since they know the geography and local terrain better than officers without a connection to the community. In the past, there have been problems when non-Tribal law enforcement agencies came on the territory without an adequate understanding of the landscape and culture of the community. He is also a strong proponent of Tribal Police having a seat at the federal table when important decisions affecting the community are made. Applying important local knowledge in the decision-making process minimizes the risk of

misunderstandings with the community and would improve the likelihood of successful operations.

A recent Government Accountability Office Report touted the potential of a border security force, the Shadow Wolves, first implemented the Tohono O'odham (TO) Nation, and suggested that it be replicated in other Tribal border communities, including Akwesasne. Chief Rourke recalls traveling to southern Arizona several years ago as a tribal member of a contingent to learn more about the program. Although a very successful example of a Tribally-driven border security force, Chief Rourke observed that the terrain is much different than Akwesasne, i.e., many miles of border across open desert at TO versus the waterways and islands across multiple jurisdictions at Akwesasne, and requires a different approach with different resources to be effective. Although much-needed attention has focused on the southern border and Tribal communities, Rourke suggests more attention should be paid to unique Tribal communities on the northern border. He expresses confidence that if the same level of attention and funding was provided to Tribal police departments on the northern border, they would be able to better secure and patrol the region. Chief Rourke also points out the need for more resources, including a new public safety building.

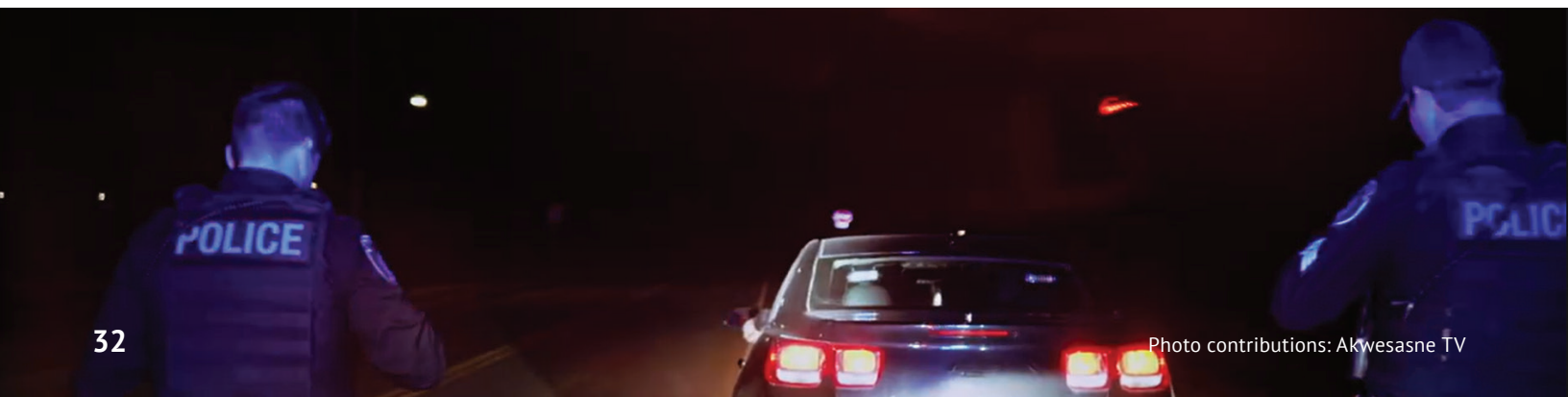


Photo contributions: Akwesasne TV

Current infrastructure limitations, such as the lack of space and inability to meet modern accreditation standards, are an ongoing challenge in moving the department forward.

### Challenges: Funding and Resources

Rourke spoke at length about management and staffing challenges. One of his goals for the department is to expand staffing levels from 28 to 50 officers; however, there is external competition for officers that can offer more benefits. Budget constraints limit staffing levels but can also prevent development of additional capabilities in the areas of criminal investigations and anti-terrorism task forces. Rourke also pointed out that federal grants can provide short-term solutions but many challenges require long-term financial commitment to be sustainable. Although SRMT PD plays a vital role in local and regional law enforcement, the department lacks certain infrastructure to support its work effectively, making external funding critical for continued success.

### Community-Oriented Policing

The U.S. Department of Justice defines community-oriented policing as a philosophy that promotes strategies leveraging partnerships between law enforcement and the community to solve problems related to public safety issues.

SRMT PD works to establish and strengthen community partnerships in several ways aimed at prevention and multidisciplinary response.

**The Kids for Fishing** event was first envisioned by SRMT PD Community Service Officer P.J. Burns and Constable Norman King in 2011. Youth between the ages of 10-17 years old are randomly selected to fish and learn alongside professional anglers, with 10 spots reserved each year for children with special needs. The event is highly anticipated every year and is strongly supported by Tribal Councils and the community. This comes from a deep understanding of the community's needs and a commitment to positive involvement and partnership. This level of community engagement from law enforcement goes to the core of the meaning of community as the Tribal Police are deeply integrated into the community.

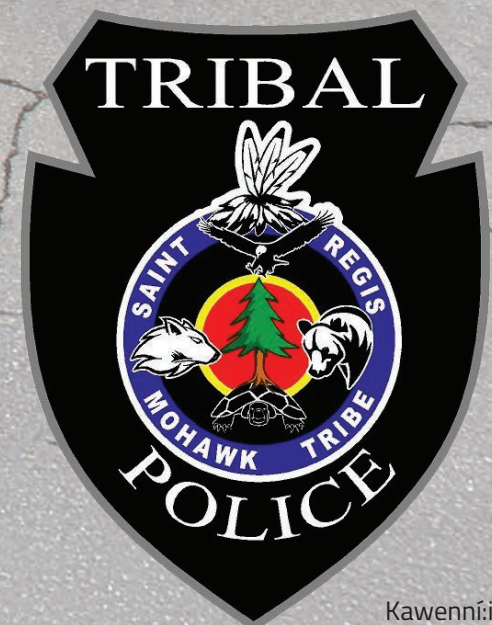
**The Handle With Care (HWC)** model is another example of a best practice that SRMT PD has embraced. It is generally accepted that exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can have profound and long-lasting negative consequences on a child's health and potential to succeed academically. The HWC model trains law enforcement personnel to appropriately respond to a child exposed to trauma at the scene of an incident and to notify their school of potential behavioral or academic problems that may follow. The notification contains only the child's name and three words: Handle with Care. No details of the incident are provided. The staff is then prepared to support the child in a trauma-informed way. Schools often partner with mental health service providers to provide referrals or on-site counseling services if needed.

Police Chief Rourke shared information about ongoing collaborations with mental health programs, such as the crisis response teams and a new initiative using tablets to connect individuals in crisis with therapists after hours. The goals of this initiative are to prevent unnecessary arrests and to help ensure that individuals in crisis receive appropriate care. Rourke says SRMT PD would be the first Tribal Police Department in New York State to implement such a program.

**Join us to celebrate our Tribal Police force for National Police Week!**



*Throughout the conversation, Chief Rourke emphasized the importance of trust, community support, and self-reliance. He talked about his and his officers' personal commitment to the community and their continuing participation in events to raise awareness of issues related to public safety. He expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the collaborations and partnerships that continue to strengthen the department and provide vital services to the community.*



# Kakwitè:ne | Spring 2025



## *Featured Spotlight: Annie Cree "Peak Views"*

Want to have your photo or artwork featured? Email [communications@srmt-nsn.gov](mailto:communications@srmt-nsn.gov) to submit your content.



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**Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe**

71 Margaret Terrance Memorial Way, Akwesasne, NY 13655

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