

KAHSWENTHA Takes on a New Direction

by Joyce Mitchell

Forging a new relationship with institutions that lack cultural aspects of the Mohawk people, Grand Chief Mike Mitchell from the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne signed a new protocol with the Royal Ottawa Hospital and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. The protocol is protected and is a copyright of the Mohawk Council of



Representatives of Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Royal Ontario Hospital and Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario pose for group picture and sacred Kahswenta protocol agreement

Akwesasne, signed April 13, 2000 at the St. Regis Recreation Centre, Kanatakon.

To explain the meaning of the Kahswentha, Grand Chief Mitchell first addressed and expressed his gratitude for the elders of Akwesasne who were instrumental in developing the framework. He stated that we need to be equals in developing our own principles and policies for the benefit of the

Mohawk Nation. This agreement is critical to the children and that is was important for our Nation to survive, not just in terms of White Man's Education, but in our own language. [It represents] who we are as Mohawk People.

Mike took the opportunity to reflect on the traditional opening done by the stu-

dents of the Akwesasne Freedom School, in Mohawk. Giving a small interpretation, he referred to the Ohenton Karihwatehkwen to show how we are to give thanks to Mother Earth for sustaining us and that we come from her. The Thanksgiving Address also refers to the Trees, Animals, Plant Life, the Moon, the Stars and beyond the heaven put here by the Creator. The recital is

See **Kahswentha** page 16

Casino continued

exploited the political divisions at Akwesasne as they ran what was then the fourth largest gambling center in the US. They demonstrated how toothless the 1988 National Indian Gaming Act truly is by ignoring all of its provisions from failing to file audit reports to openly hiring felons. To protect their operations they retained a heavily armed "warrior" group which hoodwinked the media into believing it was defending Mohawk sovereignty when in fact it was financed by the casino owners to smash internal opposition.

Our appeals to former New York Governor Mario Cuomo, a casino advocate, were ignored until two of our young men were killed during a four day gun battle in the spring of 1990. Only then did Cuomo send in the troopers thereby forcing the casinos to close.

The casino owners had relied upon the support of an entity called the St. Regis Tribal Council, a colonial government created by an act of the New York State Legislature in 1892 over the opposition of the majority of the Akwesasne Mohawks who have, for over a century, sought recognition of our existing aboriginal administration.

The Tribal Council has been characterized by considerable internal chaos and has been cited by the US Justice Department as a "criminal enterprise".

Its former "head chief" is now serving time in a US prison for various acts of corruption; this is the same individual with whom Governor Cuomo signed a gambling compact (later endorsed by Gov. Pataki) which enabled the Tribe to open its current casino a year ago.

It was also in 1999 that the US federal court had to intervene in Akwesasne when it made a decision to oust one faction of the Tribal Council in favor of another whose electoral mandate actually expired on July 1, 1999. It is anyone's guess as to who is truly in charge at the St. Regis Tribal Council

which, by its own admission, is operating its current programs at a substantial financial deficit.

Last month, in an desperate effort to secure funds, the Tribe sought to use its police force to collect taxes from the service station owners at Akwesasne. The cops were to use force to prevent fuel deliveries, a strong arm tactic which compelled the sheriff of Franklin County to withdraw the Tribal Police's deputization status. Once again, troopers from the New York State Police entered Akwesasne to perform peacekeeping duties.

And the Tribe's casino has proven to be less than successful. During its construction the Tribe contaminated the aquifer beneath the reservation which supplies drinking water to dozens of homes, a situation which has yet to be corrected. The casino building itself was so poorly designed as to force raw sewage into a nearby river, compelling some Mohawks to charge it was in violation of EPA laws and to bring the Tribe into court.

Dozens of Mohawks lost their jobs at the casino because of poor attendance and accusations of mismanagement. The initial operators, a non-native firm from Long Island, got out when they realized the venture was a loser and sold their contract to another company the Mohawk people know nothing about.

Now, Governor Pataki is ready to give the St. Regis Tribal Council the green light to operate a casino in the Catskills, a region outside of the aboriginal territory of the Mohawks. He is seriously considering making this deal with a Tribal Council of dubious legitimacy, one which does not have a judicial system or legal police force and is viewed with mistrust by most Akwesasne Mohawks.

It is this Tribal Council, inefficient and controversial, which may well be placed in a position to determine the economic fate of the Catskills.

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

April 5, 2000

TO: Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Members

FROM: Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Election Board

REGARDING: Tribal Elections

The provisions set down by the Tribal Council are in accordance with customs and practices of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.

Eligibility of Tribal Voters:

A) Must be at least eighteen years of age or older to be an eligible voter of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.

B) Must reside on the American side of the United States/Canada border.

C) Must be an enrolled member of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.

Eligibility of Candidates:

A) Must be at least eighteen years of age to hold and/or run for any elected office of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.

B) Must reside on the American Side of the United States/Canada border.

C) Must be an enrolled member of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.

Conduct of Elections:

The Election Board shall provide a sufficient number of ballot boxes so that there shall be a separate ballot box for each officer to be elected.

The Election Board shall preside over the elections.

The Election Board shall request from the Tribal Council the sum of fifty dollars for duties performed by tribal members who assist the election board in conducting the election provisions.

The Election Board shall call for a caucus on the first Saturday of May, which will be Saturday May 6, 2000.

The Election Board shall have all candidates sign an affidavit of eligibility swearing that he/she is at least eighteen years of age, that he or/she resides on the American side of the United States/Canada border.

The Election Board shall call for a general election of the Tribal Council and Clerk on the first Saturday of June, which will be held on Saturday June 3, 2000

Tribal Election Board:

signed

Norman J. Tarbell, Election Board Member

Vicki Beeson, Election Board Member

Melvin J. White, Election Board Chairperson

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's Land in Trust Application Approved by the United States Department of the Interior

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council Press Release: April 6, 2000

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe; Akwesasne - The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council has been officially notified that United States Department of the Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt has approved the land in trust applicator for the establishment of a gaming and entertainment facility at the Monticello Raceway in Monticello, New York. The application has now been forwarded to Governor Pataki for approval.

The application for the land acquisition of twenty-nine acres in Sullivan County was submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe in August 1996. The dates of the Public Notices of Intent to take the land in trust on behalf of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe were issued on August 12 and August 26, 1996. Overwhelming support has been received in the responses to the Public Notices.

Tribal Council Chiefs Alma Ransom, Paul Thompson and Hilda Smoke, who have worked diligently since 1996 to bring the Casino Project to fruition envision the significant opportunities the Monticello Casino will bring to the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe. Chief Alma Ransom stated "We have been expecting this good news for quite some time now. We have the Gaming Commission in place to begin and job applications are now being taken. We anticipate that in the next several months we will be very busy." The Tribal Council anticipates that a substantial number of tribal members will take advantage of the employment opportunities in Monticello. Approximately 3000 new jobs will be created with an estimated total of \$80 million annually in salaries and benefits and it is estimated that approximately \$23 million in construction contracts will be awarded to tribal members.

Projected plans for the Monticello Casino include a two-story gaming and entertainment complex consisting of 159,000 square foot gaming area with a combination of table games, video lottery terminal machines, poker games and bingo. The Governor's Task Force on Casino Gambling estimated that the casino would receive in excess of nine million visitors per year and estimated casino revenues in excess of \$500 million annually.

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council has contracted with Catskill Development L.L.C. and with Mohawk Management L.L.C. to oversee the development, financing, construction and management of the Casino in Monticello. Approval of the Management Contract by the National Indian Gaming Commission is expected within the next few weeks.