

# Voters Facing Historic Election, Major Choices

by Neil Drew

The St. Regis Tribal elections next month may prove to be the granddaddy of all political events at Akwesasne in many a season. The stakes are huge and the candidates are nervously champing at the Monticello trough.

The stage was set on Saturday when the ousted Constitutional Government picked a full slate of candidates to challenge the entire incumbency of the Tribal Council on the third day in June.

At the center of the election is the keyword Catskill. And the question: Should the people of the community endorse the present Tribal Council and its contract with Park Place Entertainment to build a casino at Kutshers Country Club (Town of Thompson) in the Catskills? Experts say that process could delay a Mohawk casino in that region from two to five years.

The Constitutionals, by contrast, say the chiefs have made a terrible mistake and the Tribal Councils contract with Park Place should be immediately evacuated and the Monticello project returned to the custody of Catskill Development Corporation. The chiefs in effect, fired Catskill Development when the Council signed the agreement with Park Place Entertainment on April 14.

Although the Tribal Council has been very reluctant to comment on the secret agreement it made with Park Place, some observers theorize the chiefs signed the contract to reap the immediate benefit of a \$3 million loan from Park. That cash is desperately needed to prop up the faltering Akwesasne Mohawk Casino at Hogansburg and to protect the hundreds of jobs at stake in that enterprise.

But the Constitutionals

believe the Council was short sighted in the extreme when it way-laid plans to build a Mohawk Casino at the Monticello Raceway last month. The U.S. government had already given its blessing to the plan. New York Governor George Pataki was in the process of working out the final details. It was at that critical juncture that the Council threw the project into turmoil. It did so by contracting with Park Place in what was, in fact, the 11th hour of the 11th hour for final approval of the Monticello plan.

Only a month ago there were some who were optimistically predicting that construction on the Monticello casino might actually begin sometime this year. No one is saying that now.

It is the Monticello-Catskill issue that will be at the center of the June 3rd Tribal election. And some are thinking it is this smoldering controversy that may well wake what has been a rather apathetic electorate in recent years.

There are seven positions at stake in the June 3 election. The prize? Three slots for chief, three for sub-chief and the job of tribal clerk

Here's the way the election shapes up. Incumbent Chief Paul Thompson is being challenged by Bryan Garrow and Deborah Terrance. Garrow was recently quoted as saying, "The people that are in there now are not getting information to the public, and that's not right." And, continued the challenger, "When it comes to government, what you don't know can hurt you."

Garrow, in an interview with the Watertown Times, said, "We had been working with Catskill Development Corporation for some number of years (on the

Monticello project). This is not something that happens in two or three months. We're not only confusing the governors office by trying to push two casinos in southern New York at the same time, the people on the reservation have never signed away exclusive rights to anybody for anything."

Incumbent chief Alma Ransom will face competition from Barbara Lazore and Randall Conners. Lazore has made her displeasure known regarding the Councils new contract with Park Place Entertainment. She recently warned that the members of the Council would have to answer to the voters in June. Of the agreement, she said simply, "Its heart-breaking is what it is. Heartbreaking for the community."

Rick Tarbell and Ray Cook have come forward to do election-day battle with incumbent chief Hilda Smoke. This week, Cook said in a news release, "Her (Chief Smoke) recent signing of a secret casino agreement with Park Place has many tribal members wondering what else Hilda and Terrance (Sub-Chief Richard Terrance) have been negotiating without membership knowledge and input."

When asked if the goose was cooked in relation to the Monticello plan, Cook told Indian Time, "Not at all. I'm sure Governor Pataki would be delighted to see us get Monticello back on track."

Noticeable by its absence has been any public comment from the chiefs who have apparently left that job to Tribal spokeswoman Rowena General. She says the tribes attorney has advised the chiefs not to speak publicly about the casino issue.

But General did accuse

Constitutional Government supporters of inconsistency, saying they did not make details of the Monticello project public while they were in office either.

General was quoted in the media last week as saying, "They (Constitutionals) shouldn't be so critical. All of the facts will be presented to community members. Once all of the facts are given to them, they will support the councils position."

Although the three sub-chiefs on the Tribal Council only vote on matters in the absence of a chief, the positions are considered extremely critical. Incumbent Harry Benedict is being challenged on June 3 by Charles Terrance and Patricia Tarbell. John Bigtree, Jr. is facing competition from Russell Lazore and the third sub-chief, incumbent Richard Terrance, will face off against newcomer Josie Back.

Even the race for Tribal Clerk is packed with dynamite. As you will recall, the Council, in a controversial move, ousted long-time Clerk Carol Herne back in January and appointed Patricia Thomas to take her place. Herne had fallen into disfavor because of her support of the Constitutional Government. A third candidate, Maryanne Bero, will also be on the ballot for the position of Clerk.

The date has been set, the issues focused, the candidates chosen and the short campaign begun. With so much of Akwesasne's future on the line, the June 3 election in Hogansburg looms as one of the biggest in the community's history.

If ever there were an election where every vote counts, this might be it.

Whatever your choice.

## Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Election Board

To: Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Members  
From: Chairperson/Melvin J. White  
Regarding: Official elections and positions

Dear Tribal Members,  
In accordance with tribal customs and practices, the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Election Board will make available to the community an eligible voters list following the official caucus of May 6, 2000 of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe. This list can be viewed from the hours of 8:00 am to 4:00 pm provided the Tribal community building is open. Should you have any questions about your eligibility to vote please call the election board office at 518-358-2272 Ext. 243 and ask for Melvin White the Chairperson of the Election Board.  
Respectfully yours,  
signed Melvin J. White Election Board Chairperson

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## St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

June 10, 2000 - Hogansburg, NY - On Saturday, May 6, 2000 the Annual Caucus was held for the Constitutional Government of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. At that time, the following persons were nominated for open positions on the Council.

Chief Executive Officer - 4 year term

Phillip H. Tarbell

Deborah Terrance

Randall Conners

Vice Chief Executive Officer - 4 year term

Kerney Cole

Legislative Council Seat - 3 year term

Barbara Lazore

Legislative Council Seat - 3 year term

Glenn Hill

Loren Oakes

Legislative Council Seat - 1 year term

Charles Terrance

Legislative Council Seat - 1 year term

Russell Lazore

Tribal Clerk - 3 year term

Carol T. Herne

Nancy Jacobs

Nominees must accept or decline within 10 days. At that time the Election Slate will be made official.

All enrolled members of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe are eligible to vote on June 3, 2000. Voting will take place at the Election Board Office on Route 37, next to Janet's Place.

Absentee Ballots will be available at the Election Board office. Phone 358-2621, Fax# 358-2739 or by writing to PO Box 366, Hogansburg, NY 13655.

We are encouraging each duly enrolled member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe to vote. Your vote does make a difference.