

STRAWBERRY MOON FESTIVAL: Artpark dedicates Native American Peace Garden

Artpark & Company welcomed members of the local and Western New York Native American communities to Lewiston for a ceremony celebrating the official opening of the Peace Garden.

The lower park (Fourth Street) site was created over the course of June and July. It is designed in the sacred shape of the Turtle, and will serve as a place for people from all Four Quadrants of the Medicine Wheel to come in unity and friendship.

A press release explained, "The vision is to wake up and share old traditions and Native knowledge systems; to offer visitors a place to reflect, renew, discover and relax

in a peaceful setting; and act as an ongoing Strawberry Moon Festival/Native American land-based classroom with a variety of teaching sessions for all ages, such as drum, dance and storytelling; as well as art classes, beading and indigenous plant and medicines lessons within the serene setting. It is meant to be an inclusive place where everyone can come and nourish their minds, body and soul."

The concept and initial design of the garden is the brainchild of Michele-Elise Burnett of Kakekalanicks Consultancy. It was brought to life by a Native American team from the Tuscarora Res-



ervation made up of Bryan Printup (who finalized the design), Rene Printup-Rickard, Vince Schiffert and Violet Printup.

Saturday's event will be emceed by Dr. Joe Stahlman, director of the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum.

He acknowledged a two-day Strawberry Moon Festival had been planned for 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic began in March.

"As we have seen the year unfold, we have just gradually lost control over certain aspects of our life. I feel really blessed that everyone decided to come here for this peaceful unveiling - with a limited program," Stahlman said. "It really means a lot, because we couldn't let this year go by without celebrating this unveiling."

Jordan Smith, of the Mohawk Nation, offered a thanksgiving address. He presented a pair of songs as Tuscarora youth Mackenzie Smith and Violet Rickard accompanied him with women's dance around the Turtle.

Richard Hamell, professor emeritus of Monroe Community College, gifted a wampum belt to Artpark & Company Executive Director Sonia Kozlova Clark. Tuscarora singer/songwriter Darryl Tonemah shared Native American stories and performed a series of songs.

Burnett is in Canada and was unable to attend the ceremony due to border restrictions. However, she was still able to participate. From Queenston, she paired with drummers and singers for a Strong Women song to honor all women

and Mother Earth. Artpark patrons watched from across the Niagara River.

Smith read remarks from Burnett. She was quoted as saying, "Today we have much to celebrate. We celebrate the significant achievements and contributions by indigenous peoples. We celebrate our diverse, deep-rooted culture, traditions and heritage. We celebrate walking together as indigenous peoples. We celebrate the strides, which are helping pave the way to create a cross-cultural society that is built on respect, integrity and friendship. We celebrate us. And today we celebrate the inaugural unveiling of the Native American Peace Garden at Artpark."

She also wrote, "This garden is more than a place to reflect and take in the beautiful setting along the Niagara River. It is an outdoor classroom led by native elders, knowledge-keepers, storytellers who will share their traditions, cultural, knowledge through various workshops and teachings. It will strengthen our connections to Mother Earth through honored and traditional stories and songs all about cultivating and learning about Native American plants and their medicines. It is a place to remind us to be grateful and to honor and respect one another, and all living things."

"This is our new history going forward with platforms where we can tell our stories from our lens. It is also the beginning of a friendship between Artpark and the native communities of Western New York. Collectively, we are creating, designing and curating programs that will convey the meaning - depth - substance and significant contributions of native cultures to American history and society. Inclusion of native history has been virtually absent. There has been little evidence of the important historical and contemporary events, including native peoples' involvement, knowledge and perspective, and little or no integration of those events into

the larger narrative of American history. Together, we will broaden the limited views held about native peoples with platforms such as this garden.

"This Native American Peace Garden confirms and reinforces Artpark's intention to reawaken the spirit of solidarity among friends who once forged history together."

Clark said, "I'm so honored and, on behalf of Artpark board of directors, I wanted to thank this community - all of us coming together in this process. Michele-Elise Burnett has been our guide - my teacher - in understanding the presence and the culture and the lives of our neighbors - and the meaning of this land. I'm very grateful for our neighbors, our community, our brothers and sisters, from Tuscarora and Iroquois nations for sharing this land with us."

After partnerships on music, dance and theater in recent years, the Strawberry Moon Festival debuted, and "Here we are now with our new garden, and a new place for sharing; a new place for learning, for reflection," Clark said. "So much more is to come in this physical space. We will do workshops; we will do more engage-

ment opportunities in the seasons to come; more performances. "And here we are to congratulate you all on this great step - and all these faces that are amazing to see beyond our masks. We persevered; and we have the summer, and we have this opportunity for sharing."

Clockwise from left: Jordan Smith shares music. • A Strong Women song from across the Niagara River. • Darryl Tonemah • Richard Hamell, explains the wampum belt presented to Artpark & Company Executive Director Sonia Kozlova Clark. • Rene Printup-Rickard explains the various elements inside the Peace Garden. (Photos by Joshua Maloni)

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