

ONEIDA

QUARTERLY MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER

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Summer 2026

A Message from the Nation Representative

Oneida History is American History

Shekölih. As Americans across the country celebrate the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding, we remember that on July 4, 1776, when the Founding Fathers took the bold step of declaring independence from unjust rule and oppression, they were not alone in their belief in self-determination. Our Oneida ancestors stood with them.

As the Revolutionary War spread through the colonies, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy sought to remain neutral. For the Oneida people, however, neutrality soon became impossible as our homelands emerged as a strategic objective for the British. Under the leadership of Chief Shenendoah and others, the Oneida Indian Nation chose to support the American colonists—a decision that proved critical to key victories that helped turn the tide of the war. In doing so, the Nation forged an enduring alliance with the United States that continues to shape our shared history.

Yet the Nation's role in America's founding is too often overlooked outside our own community. While local events such as the Commemoration of the Battle of Oriskany and the First Allies Craft Fair at Fort Stanwix help tell our story — history books, classrooms and popular media frequently fail to recognize the Oneida people's courage, sacrifice and contributions. America's story of independence cannot be fully or honestly told without them.



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This summer, the Nation had the opportunity to bring that story to a national audience at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.. In partnership with the museum, we presented a day-long program highlighting how our people became known as America's First Allies.

The program centered on Polly Cooper, a heroine among our people, whose compassion and service during one of the darkest periods of the Revolutionary War helped save the Continental Army at Valley Forge. Earlier this year, her legacy was recognized with the release of the 2026 Native American \$1 Coin, part of a federal program honoring the contributions of Native Nations and Native American leaders to the development of the United States.

The museum's fourth floor, named in honor of the Oneida Indian Nation, is home to the bronze sculpture *Allies in War, Partners in Peace*, which commemorates the enduring friendship between the Oneida people and the United States. It stands as a lasting reminder of the alliance forged 250 years ago and helps preserve our people's history and culture for future generations.

We were honored to share the stories of Polly Cooper and the Oneida people in our own voices with visitors from across the country, including a bipartisan group of lawmakers who recognized and celebrated our enduring legacy as America's First Allies.

As we continue working to ensure our history is remembered—not forgotten or erased—we all share the responsibility of passing it on. Each generation must understand the sacrifices and contributions of those who came before so that future generations can carry that legacy forward.

Oneida history is American history.

Ná ki' wáh,
Ray Halbritter
Nation Representative

Oneidas Join Community for Oriskany Commemoration

On the evening of August 6, Oneida Indian Nation Members and their families, representatives of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, elected officials, veterans and community residents from across the region gathered at the Oriskany Battlefield State Historic Site to commemorate the 249th anniversary of one of the more key battles of the Revolutionary War. It was at the Battle of Oriskany where the Oneida first fought alongside their American friends in their fight for freedom. Although there was no clear victor, the outcome prevented British forces from capturing nearby Fort Stanwix, helping secure future American victories at Saratoga.

During the event, Oneida Indian Nation Council member Jules Obomsawin (Wolf Clan) delivered remarks on behalf of the Nation, calling attention to the Oneida role in the founding of the United States that cemented the Nation's legacy as America's First Allies.

"As America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the United States, it is important that we remember the true history of the American Revolution and the contributions of our Oneida ancestors who fought bravely on this battlefield," said Jules. "Their service to the Revolutionary cause has not always received the recognition it deserves beyond our Nation. Most historians ignored our role in the battle. The sacrifices our ancestors made, and losses our people suffered that day, may never truly be known. Yet there is no question that the role of the Oneida people in the founding of this country is both profound and undeniable."



The Oneida contributions at Oriskany, and beyond, also were acknowledged by the evening's guest speakers, including New York State Senator Joe Griffo, Assemblymember Marianne Buttenschon, Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente, new Oneida County Historian Alexis Albright and Commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Kathy Moser.



Several Nation Members and their family members attended the commemoration, placing offerings of food and tobacco next to the memorial wreaths presented by area chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution. A moment of silence observed during the program was in memory of Kathy Patterson (Bear Clan), who passed away just weeks prior. Kathy regularly attended the commemoration with her family, helping preserve the recognition of Oneida involvement at Oriskany and the Revolution for future generations. ❖





Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian Honors Oneida Heroine Polly Cooper for America's 250th

In celebration of America's 250th birthday, the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian partnered with the Oneida Indian Nation to present "First Allies: Polly Cooper and the Oneida Indian Nation" at the Museum on July 22, 2026. The program honored the Oneida Indian Nation's alliance with the American colonists during the Revolutionary War and recognized the enduring legacy of Polly Cooper, an Oneida heroine who helped prevent George Washington's army from starving at Valley Forge.

A bipartisan group of legislators including Kansas Congresswoman and Co-Chair of the Native American Caucus Sharice Davids, New York Senator Kirstin Gillibrand, New York Congressmen Andrew Garbarino, Mike Lawler, Tim Kennedy, John Mannion, and Nick Langworthy, all spoke at the event, which explored the often-overlooked contributions of the Oneida Indian Nation to the country's founding and highlighted Indigenous perspectives on American history through cultural demonstrations, historical interpretation, and community engagement.



Despite weather-related travel challenges, a group of Oneida and Haudenosaunee dancers delivered two captivating performances that were among the event's highlights. The program also featured a food demonstration by Sheri Beglen (Wolf Clan), who shared the story of the Three Sisters and the significance of white corn, and a presentation by Nichola Aregano Diaz (Turtle Clan) on Polly Cooper and the Oneida as America's First Allies. Attendees viewed a screening of *People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation, the War for Independence, and the Making of America*, explored the Smithsonian's Native Knowledge 360° educational initiative and its free educational resources, and learned more about the sculpture *Allies in War, Partners in Peace* through remarks by Nation Representative Ray Halbritter.



Oneida and Haudenosaunee dancers performed social dance demonstrations during the event with many Nation Members who made the trip joining in.

“As we celebrate the 250th anniversary, it is important that we recognize the full spectrum of those who made possible the United States’ founding, honoring the sacrifices made to achieve our enduring freedoms,” said Nation Representative Halbritter. “Oneida ancestors were America’s first allies because they believed then, as we do now, that all people have an inherent right to sovereignty and self-determination.”

The Nation provided bus transportation and accommodation for several Nation Members to travel to D.C. and a private catered meal at the Museum the evening before the event.

The Oneida traditional dance troupe included: singer Adah Schenandoah (Wolf Clan), Heath Hill (Wolf Clan), Vin Halsey (Wolf Clan), Council member Levi Confer (Turtle Clan), Gehnew Printup (Tuscarora), Nichola Aregano Diaz (Turtle Clan), Brooke Dowdy (Wolf Clan), Brittany Ninham (Turtle Clan), Jamisin Cathers (Turtle Clan) and Yehneki'yosta' Homer – Shenandoah (Turtle Clan).



“When the United States fought for independence, Native people were not simply standing by watching as history unfolded, Native people were part of making that history,” said U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids (KS-3). “And Polly Cooper is absolutely one of those people. Polly Cooper didn’t ask for recognition, Polly Cooper didn’t ask for payment, she simply did what she believed to be the right thing to do. I think that is one of the reasons her story has endured for generations.”

continued



Above, left to right: Amanda and Chris Hjort (Turtle Clan), Rhonda Berger (Turtle Clan), Matt Jones (Turtle Clan), Tina Walker (Turtle Clan), Val Scott (Turtle Clan), Roberta Chapman (Turtle Clan), Birdy Burdick (Turtle Clan), Council member Mitch Hoffmeister (Turtle Clan), Betty Kline (Turtle Clan), Council member Chuck Fournier (Wolf Clan), Nation Representative Ray Halbritter, Council member Jules Obomsawin (Wolf Clan), Brooke Dowdy (Wolf Clan), Jamisin Cathers (Turtle Clan), Council member Derek Montroy (Turtle Clan), Brittney Ninham (Turtle Clan), Gehnew Printup (Tuscarora), Nichola Aregano Diaz (Turtle Clan), Yehneki'yosta' Homer – Shenandoah (Turtle Clan), Health Hill (Wolf Clan), Susan Johnston (Wolf Clan), Council member Levi Confer (Turtle Clan), Teyekahiyos Edwards (Wolf Clan), Vince Halsey (Wolf Clan), Ramona Beglen (Wolf Clan), Adah Schenandoah (Wolf Clan), Sheri Beglen (Wolf Clan) and Vicky Schenandoah (Wolf Clan).

“The stories of New York, America and the Oneida Indian Nation have been deeply intertwined since our nation’s founding,” said U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY). “The Oneida people were not bystanders to our revolution but were rather active participants in our quest for freedom. As American’s celebrate our 250th anniversary, we must make sure this alliance is remembered, recognized and reciprocated.”





“As our country marks our 250th anniversary of independence it’s especially important that we tell the full story, the true story, of how that independence was won,” said U.S. Rep. John Mannion (NY-22). “As was said, Oneida history is American history. The story we are here to recognize today is foundational to the story of the United States of America.”

After the harsh winter of 1777–78, Polly Cooper and other Oneidas traveled more than two hundred miles to deliver corn to General George Washington’s hungry soldiers at Valley Forge. Cooper stayed even after the rest of the relief party departed and refused payment for her contributions. Oneida oral tradition tells that she later joined soldiers’ wives, including Martha Washington, to shop in Philadelphia, where the wives bought a shawl and bonnet for Cooper; the shawl remains a treasured possession for her descendants. Cooper is featured on the 2026 Native American \$1 Coin, which honors her selfless humanitarianism.

The event was streamed live by the Museum and a recording can be found on the Museum’s YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/@SmithsonianNMAI>. ❖



MEMBER PROFILE

How Brandon Isaacs Built a Career in the Trades

College is often presented as the primary path to success. But Brandon Isaacs (Turtle Clan), a foreman at O’Connell Electric, took a different route—one that combined education with hands-on learning and a strong support system.

His story highlights the opportunities within the trades and underscores the powerful role that the Oneida Indian Nation’s Scholarship Program plays in helping individuals pursue these career paths. Brandon grew up surrounded by family members who worked in the trades, and it inspired him to follow in their footsteps.

“I’ve always had people in my life who worked in the trades,” he said. “Seeing that growing up made it feel like a natural path. It showed me that you can build a career, support your family, and take pride in what you do.”

His own journey into the trades began more than two decades ago when he applied for an electrical apprenticeship. Unlike a traditional college experience, apprenticeships blend classroom instruction with real-world, paid work. The five-year program Brandon entered required a high level of commitment and was no easy undertaking.

“It’s a structured program, which was great,” Brandon said. “It gives you everything you need to succeed, but it also holds you accountable. You have deadlines, you have expectations, and you have to stay on track. If you fall behind, they don’t slow things down for you—you have to put in the work to keep up.”

While the program demanded discipline, Brandon didn’t have to go through it alone. A critical factor in his success was the support he received from the Nation’s Scholarship Program.

“All of my books were paid for by the Nation, which made a huge difference,” he said, noting that the financial support also included a stipend to help with bills and living costs. “Having that support took a lot of pressure off. It allowed me to focus on learning instead of worrying about how I was going to cover everything.”

That support made a meaningful difference. By removing some of those financial barriers, the Nation’s Scholarship

“This is a viable alternative. It's not for everyone, just like college isn't for everyone... but if it's something you're interested in, you can make a great living and build a great career.”

- Brandon Isaacs



Brandon Isaacs with daughters, Layla, Erika and Cassie.

Program enabled Brandon to focus fully on his training and complete the program without taking on debt. It’s a model of how community investment can directly translate into long-term career success.

After completing his apprenticeship, Brandon became a journeyman wireman—the standard role for trained electricians. Over time, contractors recognized his leadership potential and offered him the opportunity to step into a foreman role.

Today, Brandon oversees job sites, manages crews, and ensures that projects run safely and efficiently. His day typically begins with detailed safety planning—identifying potential hazards, outlining the day’s work, and communicating expectations to his team. It’s a role that requires technical expertise and strong leadership and organizational skills.

“It starts with a plan,” he explained. “Every morning we go through the work, talk about safety, and identify any challenges...making sure everyone goes home safe at the end of the day. That’s the most important part of what I do.”

Brandon was drawn to the electrical trade in part for the balance it offers between physical and mental work, like planning, troubleshooting, and problem-solving. He also works in a wide range of environments—from schools and hospitals to industrial facilities and commercial developments. For those who prefer dynamic, ever-changing work over a static office setting, this can be a major advantage.

Financially, the trades provide strong earning potential and stability. Union electricians benefit from negotiated wages and benefits, and opportunities for overtime can significantly increase income—especially on high-demand projects with tight deadlines.

“When you’re on a job with a deadline, you might be working longer hours,” Brandon said. “It’s a lot of work, but it’s also an opportunity. You can really build up your income during those times, and that can make a big difference for you and your family.”

Equally important is the ability to avoid student debt. Many young people enter college without a clear sense of direction and leave with financial obligations that can take years to repay. Brandon acknowledged this reality, noting that some students realize quickly that college isn’t the right fit—but not before incurring costs.

In contrast, apprenticeships provide a pathway where individuals can earn money, gain experience, and build a career without accumulating debt.

The apprenticeship program through the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), which now partners with Mohawk Valley Community College, also provides a strong educational foundation, allowing participants to graduate with workforce experience and an associate degree. This combination creates a well-rounded foundation for long-term success.

Brandon has made it a priority to share these opportunities with the next generation. At a recent job fair at the Mary C. Winder Community Center, he spoke with students about careers in the trades, aiming to broaden their understanding of what success can look like.

“The goal was really just to open some eyes,” he said. “There’s a big push toward college, and that works for a lot of people, but it’s not the only option. There are other paths where you can be successful and build a good life for yourself.”

His message is simple but important: the trades are not a fallback—they are a first-choice career for many. They offer stability, growth, and fulfillment, particularly for those who enjoy working with their hands and solving problems.

Brandon’s story is a powerful example of what’s possible when opportunity, support, and determination come together. Ultimately, he encourages young people to trust their instincts when choosing a career path.

“Follow your gut,” he said. “This is a viable alternative. It’s not for everyone, just like college isn’t for everyone...but if it’s something you’re interested in, you can make a great living and build a great career.” ❖



Co-Ed Team Takes First Place in Golf Tournament

Congratulations to Chad Hill, Shirley Hill (Turtle Clan), Justine Hill and Bruce Hill (Turtle Clan) for their co-ed 1st place finish in the 8th annual Six Nations Agricultural Society Golf Fundraiser held July 26 at Seneca Hickory Stick Golf Course in Lewiston, NY. The team finished with a score of 63.

The fundraiser supports the Six Nations Agricultural Society Haudenosaunee Village at the New York State Fair. The 2026 Fair runs Wednesday, August 26 through Monday, September 7.

Friday, September 4, will be Native American Day at the Fair with free admission for Native Americans and many special activities taking place at the Haudenosaunee Village, including the annual Smoke Dance competition.

Share Your News

The Oneida Indian Nation would love to celebrate your achievements.

From graduations for high school seniors to certificate honors to doctoral dissertation defenders, and everything in between, the Nation is proud to share Member accomplishments.

Whether it's college, career, or other exciting endeavors, share your news with the community by emailing information and photos to memberadvocate@oneida-nation.org.

Nation Celebrates 30th Anniversary of Member Family Picnic

Hundreds of Oneida Indian Nation Members and their guests packed the Peaceful Pines campground for the 30th annual Member Family Picnic in July. Attendees were treated to a delicious menu, several door prize drawings, the ever-popular bingo tent, summer games and activities to help keep the kids cool and performances by Haudenosaunee dancers that included plenty of guest participation.

The annual Member Family Picnic is a great opportunity for the Oneida community to come together to be with family, visit with long-time friends and celebrate the Nation's success. Nation Council members distributed commemorative 30th anniversary mugs during the mystical woodland themed event catered by Turning Stone Enterprises. ♦



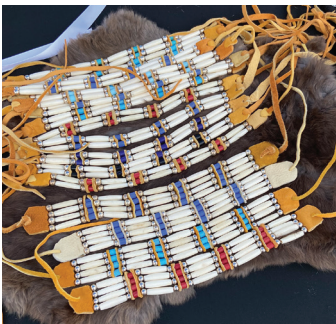
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First Allies Craft Fair Celebrates Heritage of Friendship

The Oneida Indian Nation's Shako:wi Cultural Center, Fort Stanwix National Monument and Rome Historical Society once again partnered to present the annual Fort Stanwix First Allies Craft Fair at Fort Stanwix National Monument in Rome, NY on Saturday, August 1. The Craft Fair celebrated the historical 250 year partnership between the United States and the Oneida Indian Nation.

The day included Oneida and other Haudenosaune crafters showcasing their beautiful hand-made artistry, an exhibition of the Creator's Game, social dance performances by Chris Thomas and his Ongwe'hoñ:wehkah Dancers and several traditional food options from Iroquois Eatery. ❖



Left: Ron Patterson (Wolf Clan) and Bear Clan Council member James Patterson demonstrated the craftsmanship that goes into making wooden lacrosse sticks and provided an entertaining demonstration of the game with members of the Oneida Lacrosse Club and others.

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