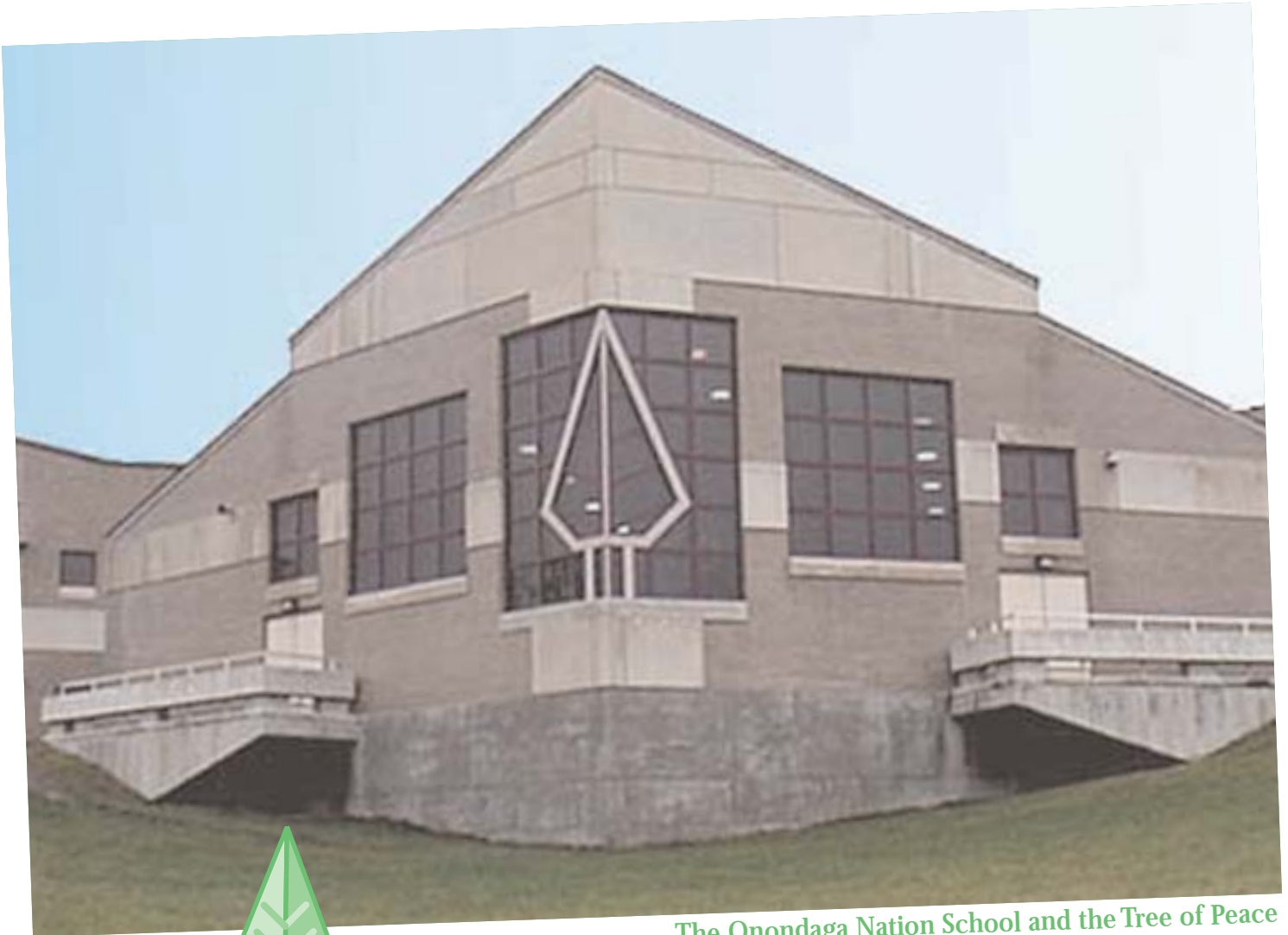




Wellbriety!

White Bison's Online Magazine

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The Onondaga Nation School and the Tree of Peace



Onondaga Nation

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White Bison Speaks

Respect...Tradition...Love

A visit to the Onondaga Nation



DRUM
The Thunder Lizard Singers sing an Honor Song as members of the Men's Healing Circle carry the Sacred Hoop to begin today's Wellbriety Day at the Onondaga Grade School Auditorium.

prayers. Creator gave us a lot of healing and a lot of help. I'm glad to be with this Hoop again."

A Good Feeling Building

Today's Wellbriety Gathering was held at the Onondaga Grade School Auditorium. You could get a feeling for how this community and the people who work with and teach the children in this community believe. The Children are Sacred. Even the location of the school and the architecture embraced the teachings of the People of the Longhouse. There is a mountain that runs parallel with the main street on which the school is located. Behind the school is an open field and the mountain forms the backdrop for this place of lessons and teachings.

There are windows in the school that form circles. Windows that form the Great Turtle and the Tree of Peace. As you walk up the sidewalks to the school you see colorful banners and strips of paper with words like **Respect**

Tradition Love written by the children in chalk or fingerprint. Words in the Onondaga language are posted all over the inside of the building.

When you enter the school you get the instant feeling that the children who attend this school feel safe within these walls. Safe and loved and nurtured. Remember the yarn exercise to demonstrate the outer circle of protection that we did on other visits, as well as here in Onondaga? Well, it is actively demonstrated within the walls of this place of learning. The children here are sacred. The people who work in this building, in this school, love their children and know they are Sacred. It's a GOOD FEELING BUILDING.

Wellbriety Day in Onondaga

We gathered inside the auditorium after a breakfast feast. The Drum is called the **Thunder Lizard Singers**—a very highly respected group of Singers. More than once we heard community members

The first Hoop Journey began on March 6, 1999 with a blessing ceremony in the Longhouse of the Onondaga Nation near Syracuse New York. Now, on May 3, 2003, the Hoop was back once again in Onondaga on Hoop Journey IV. Hoop Journey I brought the first Wellbriety Day to over 30 Tribal colleges in the US and Canada. Hoop Journey IV brings a message of healing to men and children in communities east of the Mississippi River.

What has happened in four years? Here is what one participant said after watching the Hoop Journey III video that morning: *"When this Hoop came the first time I thought, well, I guess I could give it a try because nothing is working so far. So I put some thought into that Hoop, and it helped. With my family, I asked for strength to keep us well. I've prayed with that Hoop before and I ask for strength for my family and we have had some healing from those*

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thank them for coming and helping out. The Singers have beautiful voices, and talent, but they have that extra something: they love to sing. For the people. For healing. They really enjoyed it, and their songs were gifts to all of us.

As the Thunder Lizard Singers began an Honor Song, members of the Onondaga Men's Healing Circle carried in the Sacred Hoop. About 75 Community Members followed the Sacred Hoop as it circled the auditorium and was placed on the stand in the middle of the Circle. After an opening prayer and welcoming by Clint Shenandoah, the Coordinator for this site on the Journey of the Sacred Hoop, Don Coyhis shared with those gathered how special it was to be back in the community on this, the Fourth Journey of the Sacred Hoop.

Don said, *"The Wellbriety Movement began here with the People of the Longhouse in 1999. This was the first stop on the first Journey of the Sacred Hoop and it's an honor for us to be back on your land again. We realize that this is a time when there are traditional planting ceremonies going on over at the Longhouse, and that some of you are having to divide up your time today between this gathering and the duties and responsibilities you have to your people. We appreciate your being here."*

Our day in Onondaga began with the entry of the Hoop followed by Don's presentation of the White

Bison Wellbriety products, tools, resources and other learning inspirations. He talked about the Healing Forest idea that all parts of a community must be in the healing for it to be most effective. And then in keeping with the Men's theme, he spoke about the 7 Philosophies for a Native American Man.



Clint Shenandoah, Coordinator for today's gathering and member of the Men's Healing Circle, shares his life experiences and viewpoints on his personal healing.

Viewing the Hoop Journey III video led to the first of two talking circles that made up Onondaga Wellbriety Day. Our lunch feast consisted of three different kinds of lasagna and two delicious homemade soups. One was a delicious mixture of meat, hominy and beans. The other was wild onion soup with dumplings. There was plenty of fresh fruit for both lunch and the breakfast meal. We offer many **thank you's!** to the

people who served everyone so graciously.

Good Words and the Good Mind

The rest of the day was given to the talking circle of the men's healing group and others in attendance. In this talking circle ceremony we passed the microphone so that everyone's words could contribute to the healing energy in the room.

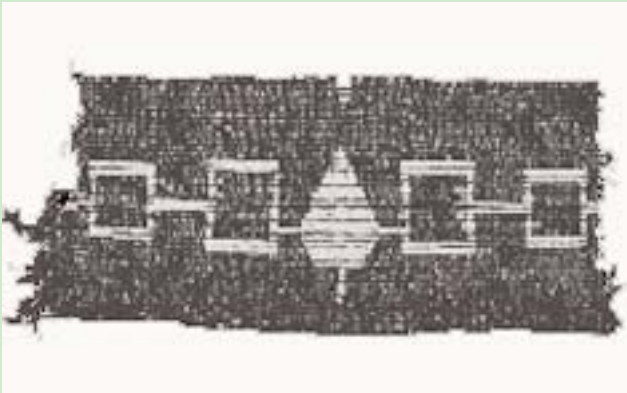
Here is some of what was said...

"I'm just a human being. I still make mistakes. Probably always will. But this—being a part of this Healing Circle with other men here in my community

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Hiawatha Wampum Belt

Many people know that the inspiration for the American Constitution came from the Haudenosaunee First Nations peoples in what is now the New York state area. The Hiawatha Belt is the first draft of the U.S. Constitution. This wampum belt with the Tree of Peace in the center represents the Five Nations Iroquois and their formation of the Iroquois Constitution, which is the oldest, purest, and most continuous form of democracy in the world. The Five Nations Iroquois are Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca.

The Tree of Peace is the symbol of the Great Law of Peace known as the Iroquois Constitution. The Haudenosaunee (People of the Long House), or Iroquois, influenced our Founding Father's ideas of democratic thought and helped forge the idea of Federalism. Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson used the Great Law of Peace to help write the Constitution of the United States of America.

and coming to events like this today—this is the most important thing I have ever done in my whole life. ... I'm proud of who I am today. My son is here with me. I'm happy today."

❖
"I'd like to thank Don Coyhis for this event. And to everyone from the Healing Circle, I'd like to say thank you. ...The Red Road is all I know today. It 's a spiritual journey. And I'm just grateful to be a part of it all."

❖
"I'm a product of an inter-racial relationship. Growing up I never had a culture. I was always torn—in between. Since I've been in recovery I'm finding a Higher Power. And I'm finding it in the Native American culture. I just want to say that I'm grateful to be here, and your culture is so rich. And for the first time in my life I feel like I'm a part of something."



Don Coyhis facilitates the yarn exercise that demonstrates the Traditional Roles of men as Protectors in our Families and Communities.

❖
"I give all my thanks to the Creator. ...I want to tell you that today is the best day of my life. This is the greatest day of my life. The best thing that happened to me today was when I woke up. I just give thanks for another day. I can't look too far ahead. I'm glad Don Coyhis is here and I want to thank him for coming."

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"Find healing wherever you can, and be open to it."

Don ended the second talking circle of the day with these words:

Don Coyhis

"I heard this prayer once. *God, Thank you for what you've given me. God, Thank you for what you've taken from me. And God, Thank you for what you've left me.*

"Part of the journey of what is left is Recovery, the Program, and getting sober and repairing things with our children. With some of my children, my relationship with them isn't what it could have been, but it's very, very beautiful. It took a lot of work and a lot of healing and a lot of talk.

"My hope now is with my grandchildren. I want to hear them say one day, *'Because Grandpa Says...'*"



Members of the Onondaga Men's Healing Circle shared with us today about their own path to healing. Tracy Thomas (standing) gave the closing comments from the Men's Circle.

My whole life's goal is to have them say, *'Grandpa Says.'* I always said *'Grandpa Says'* because of how my Grandpa was with me. To this day I still think of what he would say. When I get confused I just think, *'What would Grandpa Say?'* I knew what he would say. He was real clear on what was right and what was wrong. He wasn't wishy washy. My

goal is to hear my Grandchildren say, *'Grandpa Says...'*"

Thank you Onondaga Nation for a good day and the Good Mind! ✚

*Vette Middleton
Richard Simonelli*

