

Native American Gives Blessing to Wyoming County Trail



Unveiling a new logo to designate the Seneca Trail in Wyoming County recently were (from left) Endless Mountain Heritage Region Executive Director Phil Swank, Eaton Township Supervisor Randy Ehrenzeller, graphic artist Betsy Green, Carson Waterman of the Seneca Nation, Township Secretary Brenda Novak, and Debbie Waterman.

A member of the Seneca Nation of upper New York State visited Eaton Township officials on May 22 for the unveiling of a new logo developed to increase awareness of the Seneca Trail in Wyoming County, which parallels six miles of township roads and a portion of state Route 29 to reach the Susquehanna River. The logo, which will be used for signage and promotion, and a trail map were made possible by a grant secured by Endless Mountains Heritage Region (EMHR).

“Our basic philosophy about the earth is that it has everything to do with our environment,” said Carson Waterman of Salamanca, NY. “We need to get back to more of that.” The logo prominently features an eagle’s head at the center which, Waterman explained, is because Native Americans revere the eagle for its keen eyesight that allows the bird to see small objects from incredible heights. “We believe that the eagle looks after everything,” he related.

Waterman, an accomplished artist himself, worked locally with Betsy Green of Tunkhannock to design the logo, which has additional Native American icons across the top and bottom that represent familial groups that are part of Seneca heritage.

Traditionally, to maintain a strong blood line, marriages are arranged matrilineally by pairing icons from the two separate groups. Other Native American groups, who peacefully shared what is now upper New York State and lower Ontario and Quebec Provinces, have similar iconic structures in place to maintain a familial balance.

“All of this was going on way before the arrival of Christopher Columbus,” Waterman noted. “After that, things began to change.” The Senecas, or Onon’DoWahGas, as they refer to themselves were known as “the keepers of the western door” after the five key Indian nations made peace. They came into the Endless Mountains region to oversee the northern migration of thousands of Native Americans such as the Susquehannocks, Tuscaroras, and Monseys, who were being squeezed inland and upriver by European settlers.

According to Waterman, Gen. George Washington sent Benjamin Franklin and other envoys to the region to study the structure of Native American government, which was so foreign to the colonists, having fled from the tyranny of European monarchs.

“We made peace with the United States, and that is still intact,” Waterman asserted, but Native Americans have struggled continuously for more than 250 years to get New York State and the US government to honor its treaties. “These are facts that are not covered in history books and are not even part of the New York State (educational) curriculum,” he added.

EMHR Executive Director Phil Swank and Eaton Township officials, including Supervisor Randy Ehrenzeller, were clearly moved by Waterman's story. Swank called Waterman's words “beautiful” and said that it was important that Waterman's narrative be incorporated into the project. “It's a vital part of the history that needs to be preserved for generations to come,” said Swank.

Ehrenzeller remarked that it was an honor to have Waterman and his wife, Debbie, visit the township and give their blessing to a project that was many years in the making and was done without having to acquire any private lands. He noted that he was already noticing an increase in cyclists utilizing the Seneca Trail, which abuts the Iroquois Trail on the Tunkhannock side of the Susquehanna River.

“We're hoping to show them a little bit more of nature,” Ehrenzeller said of hikers and bikers following the trail. “We believe that nobody owns the forests, but we are all responsible for protecting them,” Waterman concurred. “I think this trail will help to bring people back to nature.”

Seneca Nation member Carson Waterman explains the meaning of the icons on the new logo for the Seneca Trail on a sign held by Eaton Township Supervisor Randy Ehrenzeller.

