

Language program gets \$450,000 in Trillium grants

By Jim Windle
SIX NATIONS

Provincial Liberal MPP for Brant, Dave Levac, crashed the party at Six Nations Polytechnic Saturday with words of encouragement from his government and himself, and an announcement of a \$450,000 Trillium grant over 24 months to help preserve and promote traditional language throughout Ontario.

"Mr. Levac has always been a strong supporter of Six Nations and especially language preservation," said Six Nations Polytechnic President and CEO Rebecca Jamieson.

"We were so pleased he could come."

The money will be divided between the Woodland Cultural Centre's language program and that of the Six Nations Language Commission.

In the first year, it will be used to Create digital archive and business plan for sustainability, funds for cataloguing in both Mohawk and Onondaga languages, and recording and transcribing stories and cultural documents into Mohawk and Onondaga.

The Woodland Cultural Centre focuses more on the Cayuga language.

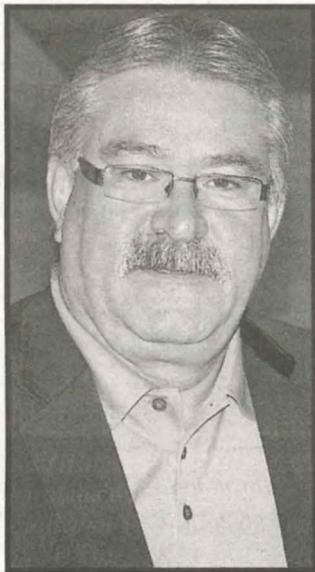
The second year will include a digital archival plan as well as the creation of digital recordings of language speakers to help teach the traditional languages for generations to come.

Six Nations Polytech will supervise project personnel and make the Deyohaha:ge (Indigenous Knowledge Centre)'s linguistic and cultural resources and archives available to the project.

They will provide meeting and research space, provide a home for the project, a language resource room, which

will permanently host the project. They will also be the source of student volunteers from the language program and engage with its language stakeholders.

Language and the culture are inextricably linked to one another and there is nowhere that this is more true than at Six Nations, with six languages and cultures linked



MPP Dave Levac brings \$450,000 from the Trillium Foundation for language preservation at Six Nations. He is a strong supporter of language preservation.

so closely together.

Six Nations Polytechnic hosted a Six Nations Language Conference over three days this past weekend which brought together many language instructors and educators from throughout the Haudenosaunee region to share their successes and to encourage one another with best practices experiences.

Rebecca Jamieson was excited about the large turnout and enthusiasm the participants showed throughout the weekend.

"Part of what we do at

Polytech is language revitalization which is one of our primary objectives," she said during a break in the program. "We have made a sincere effort over the last two or three years to develop collaborative partnerships with community agencies. Last year we held an aboriginal language day. We invited all the community programs to showcase and we provided a breakfast. Since then, we've worked at developing more partnerships with the Woodland Cultural Centre, and the language commission."

This was by far the most ambitious program to date drawing participants from several Iroquoian communities including Akwesasne and Kahnawake.

Frank Miller, a respected Mohawk language educator and speaker, fully supports the program and any others that preserve this important piece of Mohawk culture.

"Over the past 20 years since I got involved with it, I have seen more and more people every year and the encouraging thing about it now is that we are seeing younger people," said Miller. "Before, we had a bunch of people who had lost their language through the residential schools, and they were the ones coming to the programs to try and rejuvenate their language. Now, these young people are going to be the parents of the future and hopefully they will pass it on to their children."

But once someone learns the language there are currently not many opportunities in a social setting to speak or hear the language. This is a problem Miller would like to see fixed somehow.

"For the Mohawk language, the only thing we have is the Mohawk Longhouse," he says. "We need

to be looking at other possible opportunities as well to help build and retain what is learned. Small groups do get together sometimes but is not enough."

Onondaga Chief Arnold General was also encouraged by the return to the traditional culture and language he has noticed over the past few years.

"When I was in my early teens, there wasn't much speaking of the language," he recalls. "I think at that time it was the school system pushing English language all the time and not many of us young fellas got to hear it. I learned my language from the elders. I was always at the longhouse and was constantly talking with elders."

Getting on in years now, it does his heart good to see the recent resurgence of the Haudenosaunee traditional languages.

"I am glad to see it revitalizing itself," says Chief General. "It's coming back together and my grandkids, even the little ones, understand the language now. I talk to them as much as I can in the language — just conversational language. That's



Six Nations Polytechnic President and CEO Rebecca Jamieson. (Photo by Jim Windle)

when we have to teach them, right from the time they are born."

Miller explains how the richness of the traditional languages has been lost in translation into English.

"As part of the program here this weekend, I did a story board yesterday and I found that it took a lot longer to do it in Mohawk, because when I was translating into English I was just hitting the high spots but wasn't getting into the details," he says. "In Mohawk you get a lot more detail and a lot more information. It is really more co-

lourful than English. Each syllable is a message in itself."

Chief General agrees.

"You say it's a nice day in English and that's it," he says. "But in the dialect, it describes what you see in front of you and that's what gets lost in translation. Sometimes when you translate something into English it's really quite funny."

There are plans for more similar programs in the future as well as making the language conference itself an annual or semi-annual affair.