

Iroquois studies offered at college

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OHSWEKEN — It's a tradition among many native people to cut holes in each sole of a baby's first pair of moccasins. You may think the holes are put there to teach the baby that all things in life aren't perfect. Or, that the moccasin maker didn't want to be irreverent, since only the Creator can make perfect things. If so, you're close, but no Kewpie doll.

Consider that before babies are born, they dwell in the spirit world. The spirits love and cherish them because all babies are honest, good, innocent, trusting and affectionate. They are sweet smelling and clean from all sin. The spirits take good care of them and want to keep them forever but must release them to earth when it is their time to be born.

When a baby leaves to become a being of a human mother, the spirits mourn and worry and become very unhappy. They love the baby so much that they don't want to let it leave the upper world. They fear humans

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may not love the baby or be able to take good care of it.

They begin planning to get the baby back. They feel justified in coming to earth to persuade the baby to return to the spirit world with them. And that's where the holes come in.

When the spirits come, the baby can honestly say that it cannot go with them because it has holes in its moccasins. Therefore, it is unable to accompany them on their long journey.

This is one of many anecdotes that's bound to be shared, discussed and analyzed during a new Mohawk College liberal studies

credit course entitled Iroquois Culture and Tradition. In addition to learning about Iroquois Patterns of Space, Time and Religion, Kinship and the Family System will be taught. Other topics include history, economy, medicines, containers, life cycle, symbols and government.

Instructor for the course is Ratshatentha, or Jacob Thomas, Cayuga elder of the Sandpiper clan. A faithkeeper in the Longhouse, he is chairman of the board of Iroquoian Institute. He also teaches native studies at Trent University.

Classes began at the Mohawk College New Credit campus on Tuesday and include 10, three-hour sharings of ancient teachings and beliefs.