

# Conversations in Cultural Fluency: The Two Row Wampum

By Jayson Koblun

**OHSWEKEN** – The Haudenosaunee use storytelling and the gift of oration to preserve their rich teachings and culture. The final lesson in a series of public lectures at Six Nations Polytechnic emphasized the importance of keeping this practice alive.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy website says that the tradition isn't just about telling stories; it's a positive way to teach the beliefs and values that the Haudenosaunee hold. Through each story the listener can learn the val-

ues, laws and acceptable behaviours of a community.

Historian Rick Hill was the first of three guest speakers at the meeting organized by the Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre last Friday. He shared with listeners the history of the Two Row Wampum and what he believes its role is in today's culture.

In short, Hill said that the Two Row Wampum was made as an agreement with the first Dutch settlers in North America. An agreement, or treaty that stood to symbolize

their new relationship — two vessels travelling down the same river in the same direction, living and learning together but never crossing paths or interfering with one another.

"This treaty was to exist as long as nature exists," said Hill. "But colonization has twisted the two rows."

Hill said that the meaning behind the Two Row Wampum has not changed in today's culture and that balance is key.

"It's the space in-between [the two rows] we have to think about," said

Hill. "Keeping our story alive and active while making sure we always hold true to ourselves."

Second to share was Bob Antone of the Oneida Turtle clan and he spoke on the values of the Haudenosaunee teachings today. Antone, a scholar and advocate of decolonization also shared ways that First Nations people and Canadians can work towards repairing their damaged relationship — a relationship between two nations that the Two Row Wampum was originally designed to help flourish.

Antone suggests that

part of this process involves making sure the younger members of the community are well-versed in their people's history.

"Don't silence young people," he said. "Engage them and help them understand."

Susan Hill, whose extensive academic training includes a PhD in Native Studies, spoke last at the lecture and discussed several of the different responsibilities indigenous people have as they and Canadians attempt renewed relationships and try to embody the

message of the Two Row Wampum.

She said that most non-indigenous students in her Native Studies classes are there because they really want to be there, and that they may be there because "they know they have a responsibility that they may not fully understand."

The lecture ended after a question period where audience members could comment and ask the three academics questions about what had just been presented.