

Oneida fine-tunes joint governance

By Jim Windle

ONEIDA – Oneida of the Thames is looking back to the future by making steps towards a newly designed government that reflects the Great Law of Peace and extract themselves from the Indian Act and the enforced elected system of governance.

The concept has been discussed and batted around for years but in January of 2015, the idea of one united council was floated in a joint media release. The release was a Draft declaration of a proposed partnership between the two, transitioning the elective body into a role of administration and restoring the decision making to the clans and clan mothers through the traditional chiefs. The first hope of the amalgamation is to unify the people of the community.

“In acknowledging the voice of the people, both councils are committed to working together in order to restore our original system of governance and to remove the shackles of controlled oppression that have been imposed on our community for over eighty years. The path to Nationhood involves the removal of the Indian Act and rejection of the colonial gov-

ernment,” says the release signed by Elected Chief Sheri Doxtator and Traditional Chief Howard Elijah Otatshere on behalf of the traditional council.

Since there has been much debate and discussion amongst and between all parties, but the concept continues to inch forward.

“The concept has been largely accepted by the people, however there are a lot of details yet to be worked out,” says Councillor and acting elected chief Joel Abram, who admits there is a considerable pushback on the idea by some community members. Chief Sheri Doxtator was unavailable for comment being away from the office at the time of our call.

Some of the many details to be considered and detailed include safety and security of the community. How will lands and resources decisions be carried forward with the province and the federal government? Food security which will encourage the growing of Oneida’s own food wherever possible, but the most important, according to Abram, is healing and wellness for both individuals and the community at large.

Another issue that needs to be established is where exactly the lines of

administration and leadership cross as well as the short two-year-term of office of the elected council. That term is to be extended under a new joint council.

The two councils have been meeting monthly to work out these and other details. These meetings, are not set up with each council sitting across from each other, but rather all councillors and chiefs sit according to the longhouse tradition in clans.

The change will impact the community in many ways both positive and negative as any change of this magnitude will. So far there have been 10 former employees of Women’s Shelter who have been recently let go under what they have been told is “restructuring”.

The concept of a restored traditional governance with the elected council as administrators as also been spoken about at Six Nations of the Grand River for several years, the closest efforts coming under former elected Chief David General in 2005. Apparently an election and the outbreak of tensions at the Caledonia reclamation of Kanonhstaton (Douglas Creek Estates) derailed the talks between councils, and they have never picked up those talks since.