

Onondaga Chief Peter Sky passes at 82

By Lynda Powless
Editor

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy has lost one of its long time serving leaders with the passing last week of Onondaga Deer Clan Royanni Peter Sky.

Pete Sky, a chief for at least 56 years passed away last Wednesday. He was 82.

A well known and respected Confederacy "Chief" he was known for his knowledge of Haudenosaunee history, ceremonies and language.

"He carried himself with respect and dignity and worked hard to keep our ceremonies going on and our traditional culture in people's minds," said Leroy Hill, Confederacy Secretary and Cayuga sub-chief.

He said many people did not know him outside the longhouse. "But he was a real good speaker. And he had a real good memory for speaking. When he spoke he could bring out a lot of those teachings and memories," he said.

The late chief spoke at least three of the six Haudenosaunee languages. He was fluent in Onondaga and Cayuga and spoke Seneca.

"He was really strong in longhouse, in council. He was really strong at the Onondaga Longhouse. He rolled up his sleeves and would do the work that had to be done whether it was cutting wood or carpentry or construction, he was right in there," said Hill.

"Even last year he was cutting wood. He was active in

the singing society. He had a good voice for singing. He was a good singer," said Leroy Hill.

But his passion was lacrosse.

"He loved lacrosse. He used to make sticks and last year he was netting sticks for the Arrows players. The guys would bring their sticks to him to get them restrung."

"I was so happy to see him surrounded by hats from all the lacrosse teams here. He

His last words to the chiefs were:

"Swajagoh. You guys go all out!"

**Peter Sky
Onondaga Deer
Clan Royanni**

would have just loved that."

He said he held a lot of history and memories of the Haudenosaunee.

"He had had stories and teachings that I had not heard before. You wouldn't read it in a book."

Leroy Hill said his grandfather, Joe Logan was one of Pete Sky's teachers.

"I think that's why he tried to pass what he knew on to me. He took me in as a son, teaching me. I think it was because of my grandfather."

He said "his knowledge wasn't book smart. It was taught by his teachers. His main teachers were my grandfather and David Thomas. That's who mentored him. They used to sit him between them and tell

him stuff. He did that with me and told me to try and stay on the good path.

"He was well respected and relied on. I started just driving him around and would sit and listen."

He said when Chief Sky would give "talks and even when we had practice, I would watch him. He would give me tips and pointers in being a speaker and carrying that knowledge and what you should and shouldn't do."

Pete Sky performed the wedding service for the longhouse.

"Yeah he was the guy from council who did weddings. Now we are gonna have to figure out what to do with that. Council will have to appoint someone."

His knowledge and guidance will be missed.

"For sure. That's gonna be a tough one for us with him gone but we have to keep moving," Leroy Hill said.

That's the last thing Pete said, "Swajagoh! You guys go all out!"

Hill said with every generation there is change.

"Every generation things change a bit. We lose knowledge and elders. When we do condolence that's what we say. We used to have more knowledge a long time ago. It was a slow, gradual process that we are living through that. But it doesn't diminish the purpose of what we are living through."

He said the loss of a strong Onondaga speaker from the "bench" will be felt. "But we have a couple of



Onondaga Chief Pete Sky during display of wampum belts. (Photo by Lynda Powless)

Onondagas with the language so hopefully they will step in and help the chiefs existing there right now, but I know some of the chiefs have some language."

He said, "Pete is a lot of the reason I can speak Onondaga. And I'm still working on it."

Arnold Hill remembers him fondly. "Chief Pete Sky was a very truthful man about our ways. He is taking great knowledge on his journey home. I am very proud to have known him," said Arnold Hill.

Leroy Hill said the late Chief Sky "took council seriously and the ceremonies and keeping them going."

A former welder and ironworker Pete Sky worked his regular job and then "we would get together after the regular job and he would teach us about ceremonies. Even before he retired we were getting together. He was worried about carrying on our ceremonies I think all of us were working 9 to 5 jobs but we were still getting together to learn and he would tell us things.

"I remember when he told me he had diabetes about 30 years ago. He said even then he had more faith in our medicines than in the hospitals."

Leroy Hill said, "even when he was in the hospital this

last time he said "I've got more faith in our medicine." "He said the doctors didn't know what was wrong with him but he said his ticker was over 80 years old, and it was kinda hard to say if it was gonna stop or not, but it was slowing down."

Leroy Hill said he has been around the chiefs and traditions a long time.

"I've been around those guys my whole life.."

He said "We have to just roll with this and make adjustments and support one another."

In Syracuse, a second Onondaga Chief has passed. Virgil Thomas passed last week. His funeral is this week.