

'Meet your chief' gathering get advice

by Paul Barnsley

SIX NATIONS - Chief Harvey Longboat did his best to explain to the people how the Confederacy council has reached its current state of disarray and about what can be done to fix it.

He was speaking to the hundreds of people who spent last Saturday at the Onondaga Longhouse, meeting the Clan Mothers, Faith-keepers and Chiefs and hearing about the state of the Six Nations Confederacy council.

Each of the Chiefs in attendance introduced himself, his Clan Mother, Faith-keeper and runner or explained why the positions weren't filled.

Onondaga Chief Arnie General was the informal host for the meeting of the people and the Chiefs.

Several Chiefs admitted that there are positions not filled or, as in the case of Oneida Chief



The parking lot was overflowing at the Onondaga Longhouse "Gathering the People".

Wendall Froman, more than one Chief occupying a single position.

One of the gathering's orga-

nizers, Wendy Hill, made an impassioned plea to the Chiefs and the people to make the traditional council work as it was

intended to.

"Things aren't working very well," said Hill. "A lot of people don't know how it's supposed

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to work because it hasn't worked the way it's supposed to for about 200 years."

"Each one of us has a representative. Everybody fits in somewhere," she continued. "Every person is supposed to be equal but our Chiefs have more responsibility. I don't know what's going to happen if we don't start helping them."

Hill urged the people to take a larger role in the affairs of the community and urged the Chiefs to reach out to the people more often. She said a heavy burden becomes lighter when it is shared by more people.

"All that weight of the decision making is supposed to sit on the shoulders of the people," she added.

Hill said experiences like the residential schools have left their mark on her people.

"It taught us to not feel. It taught us to not communicate. It taught us to be hard," she said. "There's some that didn't come here today because of that hard feeling."

Hill said Cayuga Chief Jake Thomas told her he would not attend the gathering because he is discouraged by the division on the council.

Immediately after Hill's emotional speech Chief Longboat rose to explain some of the problems within the council.

"There's 2 sides to our council," he said. "We do things for each other."

He explained that the

Mohawks, Senecas and Onondagas - the 3 brothers - sit across the council fire from the 4 brothers: the Cayugas, Oneidas, Tuscaroras and Tutelos.

When a Chief is put up for condolence by his Clan Mother his clan must approve, then his nation, then the 3 (or 4) brothers. Then the brothers pass the proposed Chief across the council fire for the approval of the other brothers.

Chief Longboat said that small condolences have contributed to the confusion. He said small condolence ceremonies were originally designed to temporarily fill a Chief's position until the larger condolence ceremony could be performed.

"Small condolences have helped create some of the problem," he said. Our forefathers started it for a purpose. They couldn't condole in 3 days."

With the loss of language and culture in the last 200 years, Longboat said, it takes as long as 6 months to condole a Chief.

Chief Longboat said there is an unresolved dispute with Mohawk communities which has created tension on the traditional council.

While there are only 9 Mohawk titles, each of four Mohawk communities want to name 9 Chiefs.

"We asked the Mohawk nation to fix their side up," he said. What are we going to do? Are we going to have 9 Chiefs or 36?" he said. "You better straighten it out before you