



St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

Chief Ron LaFrance Jr.
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NEWS RELEASE

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Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Opens the Diabetes Center for Excellence

Akwesasne N.Y. - The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe and Health Services presented the Grand Opening of the Diabetes Center for Excellence on Wednesday, February 12, 2014 from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m. The Diabetes Center for Excellence is a community tribute to the future health and wellness of Akwesasne. The vision behind the structure was to have a home for specialized services focusing on prevention and diabetes management. The vision of many is now a reality for Akwesasne. Diabetes affects 16 percent of our Mohawks living on the territory, as compared to a state prevalence of eight percent. The Let's Get Healthy Program offers family-based education programs in fitness, diabetes health, nutrition and prevention. "Engaging the community in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle is the mission of the Diabetes Center For Excellence", states Heather Garrow, Program Manager. Guests of the ceremony were honored to have Sub-Chief Eric Thompson give the Thanksgiving address in the Mohawk language. The ceremony was complete only after an incredible performance by the Haudenosaunee Cultural Group; dancers gave a Three Sister's Play, a Fancy Shawl dance, a Jingle dance and a group hoop dance.

The 3.6 million dollar building holds a 15,000 square foot footprint in Generations Park, land donated by Margaret Terrance with intent to care for our elders. Generations Park fosters a connection between *Akwesashró:non*, young and young at heart. The Diabetes Center for Excellence provides space to address diabetes management, including a 2,500 square foot fitness room, a heated floor for yoga, a pool for aquatic exercise, including an assisted lift for easier access and a theatre kitchen. The nutritional support includes both counseling and cooking demonstration space. A relaxation room offers a mind-body connection to teach meditative stress reduction. Stress can be a significant factor in the management of chronic disease. "This building brings hope to those afflicted by diabetes. The tenacity of Janine Rourke brought diabetes and obesity to the public conscience at Akwesasne," Chief LaFrance remarked as he extended his gratitude to the woman in the second row, Janine Rourke, the tireless champion recognized and thanked in every Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal leader's speech during the ceremony. Janine led the program for over a decade. "Without her dedication, hard work, perseverance and vision, we would not be standing here today", said Debbie Martin, the former Director of Health Services. Debbie retired the first week of February and proudly spoke about the history, the commitment and the dedicated volunteers who made the Diabetes Center for Excellence possible. Among the groups recognized were the community members who participated in and organized multiple Golf tournaments, the first of which raised \$65,000.

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Chief Paul Thompson was present in heart. His grateful words were shared with the crowd of almost 100 people. He recognized the Akwesasne Housing Authority who took a lead role in this important effort, sponsoring and organizing events. “Retha Herne presented a check for one million dollars to fund this project. It was absolutely amazing”. Present were instrumental guests from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development who contributed \$336,000. Chief Thompson and Chief LaFrance thanked Brian Murray, the Northern Regional Area Director and Renee Hotte, also from the USDA Rural Development offices. Martha Torrez and Stanley “Lee” Telega represented the USDA from the national and state offices, respectively. Ms. Torrez traveled from Albuquerque, New Mexico to join our celebration.

The Planning and Infrastructure Division of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe was responsible for all of the construction management. Director Ernie Thompson shared stories of the collective efforts of construction, the architects and engineers and his team, led by Colleen Thomas. Heritage Homes was selected as the contractor of the facility in August of 2012. The construction design allows for an expansion phase that will accommodate future needs, including an indoor walking track.

Fundraising for this endeavor has been tremendous. The leaders all took time to thank the many donors, including the Annual Golf Committee members and golfers, the Black Tie Committee, the Akwesasne Garden Club members, the Annual 7 Miles for 7 Generations walk participants, the St. Regis Mohawk School, and hundreds of individual donors. There was significant financial support through HUD Indian Community Development Block Grant in the amount of \$600,000, the USDA Community Facilities Program grant of \$515,880 and HUD Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) presented the project with \$800,000. Contributions from the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe and Akwesasne Mohawk Casino Resort total \$1.4 million.

Officially, the Diabetes Center for Excellence began seeing patients in late 2013; the Center welcomed 235 people and over 700 visits. The future of diabetes care is changing on the Mohawk territory of Akwesasne. “For centuries, the word “Diabetes” never crossed the lips of our ancestors. It is now in every conversation with our loved ones as we plan our meals, meet our friends, send our children to school, perform our jobs and dream about the future of our grandchildren. The vision held for a Diabetes Center of Excellence Institute is to create the opportunity for all *Akwesashró:non* to recover the balance, harmony and peacefulness of a good life without Diabetes once again”, original words by Janine Rourke.

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government of the Saint Regis Mohawk People.