



Community Interviews: Part I

By: The Oneida Trust and Enrollment Committee

This series of articles is designed to inform Oneida citizens about enrollment issues. The total number of Oneida enrolled members is expected to decline within the next 10 years. The goal of these articles is to generate community conversations about citizenship and belonging so that we may explore our options.

Sustain Oneida is conducting an ongoing series of community interviews. Oneida citizens, tribal council members, and youth groups shared their ideas about community, engagement and enrollment. To maintain anonymity, responses are grouped together.

1. What does community engagement mean to you?

"Depends on what part of the tribe, employee or member. For a certain amount of time each year I am engaged as a full-time employee."

"I think about the seven generations. Only I see us as being in the middle so we look back three generations and look forward three generations. Connection to the land is a big part. We don't have much of a connection to the New York Oneida, they are seen as the past. For me, being Oneida is being Haudeneshonee; there is no separation of the three Oneida reservations."

"We are getting into a system to capture our voices. The voice of both employees and non-employees. We didn't have a 75 person quorum at GTC (General Tribal Council) meetings for years, but now we have many people showing up because of the \$100 incentive. Is this good or bad for engagement? Is it worth all this money to hold a meeting? There is an entitlement mentality to engagement. That's a white person's system."

"We're so busy trying to be second class white people that we forgot how to be Indian. People get offended by that, but it gets at the psychological."

2. What is a time you felt engaged in the Oneida community?

"When I go to powwows, Move It Oneida, Sexual Assault Awareness Event." "When I go to ceremonies, dancing, going to the Wise Women Gathering Place." "When I got my Oneida name at Longhouse." "When they used to have the carnival behind the Norbert

Hill Center." "Going to powwow." "Picking strawberries." "School tapping maple trees." "Hunting for elders." "Wise Women." "Domestic violence walk." "Zumba." "Fry bread." "Corn soup." "Races."

"Being involved is just a way of being. Living in Milwaukee it's different because there's a lot of different Native people. Some days I'm doing Oneida things and other days doing bigger Native stuff. I made a career change because I wanted to provide more direct services to people. For me that engagement is one-on-one with people."

3. What is a time you felt you did not belong in the Oneida community?

"I don't have a clan (my mom is a west coast tribe, not Oneida) so I don't know where to sit at longhouse. We sit with the wolf even though we are not wolf clan."

"They teach Spanish and Hmong at our high school but not Oneida. Wish we could take it there." "When I don't know tribal government stuff." "When I try to think of an Oneida word and only Spanish words come to my mind. Because that's the language we are taking at school the most." "When I couldn't compete in powwow because I'm not enrolled." "I'm a different tribe (Osage/Ponca) so I feel different."

4. How much would you say you are engaged with the Oneida tribe? / What do you do to stay engaged with the Oneida tribe?

"When I can carry on my grandparents last name." "When I know community events going on like the powwow at UW-GB." "When you can introduce yourself and say hello in Oneida." "When you can teach someone something about your culture." "When I can hear the powwow drums from my house."

"I see the bigger picture, I am an Oneida national. That keeps me engaged."

"People may go visit other reservations but not be active here. I always ask people, 'What do you want?' It's a hard question and people get tired of it and say, 'Just gimme something!' Engagement is key to every community. With Sustain Oneida what are you trying to sustain? What do you want? Are we a community or a corporation? Which comes first in our efforts? We need to get people to understand this. We need to separate the corporate from the community."

"I don't look at the tribe as the res. I look at the tribe as the people. This is one of the evolutions of my thinking. I see beyond the res. Take care of people even if they live off the res. There are three different Oneida tribes. Historically we are one. We should move toward that. Some say we are already one and some say we're separate. I say, 'Oneida is my home, but I'm from Milwaukee.' I miss home. In an ideal world I would live in Oneida."

“There’s many levels to [staying engaged]. On the personal level, I am educating my boys about what it means to be Oneida since they won’t grow up on the res. Getting them involved culturally; learning the language, music. On a work level I try to build bridges between Milwaukee and Oneida. People say, “I’m a Milwaukee Oneida” or “I’m an urban Indian.” But we are all Oneida.”

Stay tuned for more interview responses in the next issue!

For more information about Sustain Oneida please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/OneidaTrust>

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For comments or questions please email: sustainoneida@oneidanation.org.