



# St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

Chief Randy Hart  
Chief Ron LaFrance Jr.  
Chief Paul O. Thompson  
Sub-Chief Shelley Jacobs  
Sub-Chief Michael L. Connors  
Sub-Chief Eric Thompson

## NEWS RELEASE

For more information:  
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David T. Staddon, Director  
Public Information Office  
Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe  
Tel: (518) 358-2272 ext. 286

### **Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Donates \$100K to Akwesasne Freedom School**

**Akwesasne Territory** – The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council presented a check for \$100,000 to the Akwesasne Freedom School. “This school is important to us because of the value they provide to the community” said Randy Hart, Tribal Chief. “Without them, our efforts to retain the Mohawk language would be much more of a challenge.”

The Akwesasne Freedom School (AFS) is an independent school that conducts year-round, full-day classes for grades pre-k to grade nine. Mohawk parents founded the school in 1979 because they were concerned with local public schools’ lack of cultural and linguistic services. In 1985, the school made a historic decision to adopt a Mohawk immersion curriculum. AFS was the first to implement this curriculum. It did so without state, federal or provincial governmental approval or funding. By focusing on the young people, the assimilation process can be reversed and ensure that the Mohawk people do not lose their language, culture or identity. Tribal Chief Paul Thompson noted, “We can make this donation because of the present leadership on tribal council. We value the preservation of our language, culture and traditions. It’s who we are and it’s the future.”

On behalf of the AFS, Elvera Sargent, Sheila King and Okiokwinon Francis were on hand to receive the donation from tribal council. “We appreciate this from the bottom of our hearts,” said Sargent. It’s time for the whole community to work together to preserve our culture.” Sargent serves as the manager of the Friends of the Akwesasne Freedom School, a non-profit organization that helps support the school. “Had my father been alive, he would be elated for this donation to the Akwesasne Freedom School,” remarked Tribal Chief Ron LaFrance. I never in my wildest dreams thought that this would happen. I’m very proud that we’re doing our utmost to keep our language and culture alive.”

The Akwesasne Freedom School is dedicated to preserving the Mohawk language, continuing Mohawk traditional cultural practices, promoting the principles of good mind, peace and strength given by the Creator, preparing students to be active participants in both our traditional community and Western society and encouraging students to have pride in, understanding of and sufficient knowledge to practice *Rotinohsón:ni* customs and promote cultural values. The school also stresses teaching students to be responsible, independent and hold a positive self-concept and display respect for others, especially Elders and their knowledge and to prepare students to be teachers of future generations.

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412 State Route 37  
Akwesasne, New York 13655  
Phone: 518-358-2272

“Since 1979 the quality and quantity of people coming out of the school speaks volumes for the foundation of our community,” said Tribal Sub-Chief Eric Thompson. “They represent our community very well in many, many ways.” Many of the AFS students have gone on to succeed in higher education and positions of influence in the community. “We’re very appreciative and it will go a long way for the students, parents and community,” commented Sheila King, school Administrative Assistant. “This will support community cultural values.”

“This was a huge surprise for us,” said Okiokwinon Francis, AFS Office Manager. “As a past student, it means a lot. We thrive on the goodness of others. On behalf of the students we have now and in the future, *niawen:kowa*.” Tribal Council will allocate the donation in two portions to help support the upcoming school year.

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



Pictured Left to Right: Chief Paul O. Thompson, Sub-Chief Shelley Jacobs, Elvera Sargent, Sub-Chief Eric Thompson, Okiokwinon Francis, Chief Randy Hart, Sheila King and Chief Ron LaFrance.