



St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

Chief Monica M. Jacobs
Chief Mark H. Garrow
Chief Randy Hart
Sub-Chief Pamela D. Brown
Sub-Chief Stacy A. Skidders
Sub-Chief Shelley Jacobs

PRESS RELEASE

For release:
Tsiothorko:wa/January 18, 2011

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

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Honors the Passing of Ernie Benedict *Community Will Miss Traditional Leader and Storyteller*

Akwesasne Territory. Ernie Kaientaronkwen Benedict's life was one of dedication and commitment to Native People in many different areas. He was a strong supporter of the rights of Native People everywhere. "Traditional leader, storyteller, soldier, mentor, scholar – all of these words describe Ernie's life," said Tribal Chief Monica Jacobs. "He always had good stories, and we will all miss him." Mr. Benedict passed away on the morning of January 8, 2011 at age 92.

Ernie graduated from St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY in 1940 prior to entering the military during World War II and was one of the first Natives from the area to earn a university degree. This achievement led him to inspire others to complete their educational aspirations and to use education as a tool for the advancement of Mohawks and other Native people. He passed along his legacy as a teacher, a writer, a historian and university professor. Today, the Mohawk Tribe has one of the highest levels of educational attainment of any tribe.

"Ernie was a strong advocate for Native Peoples' rights and sovereignty," noted Mark Garrow, Tribal Chief. "One aspect of that was his advocacy of the right of Native People to control our own educational process." Education is a vital aspect in maintaining the rights of individual Native People and Native communities. "Now it's up to us to continue those traditions," added Garrow.

In 1995, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation of Canada awarded Mr. Benedict the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for his accomplishments in education. "The legacy of the work and life of Ernie will be with us forever," commented Tribal Chief Randy Hart. "His dedication and commitment to Mohawk People and Native People everywhere will remain part of our destiny."

Ernie was the first to take a stand against federal encroachment on the liberties of Native people when he refused the draft before WWII. His logic was that since he is first a Mohawk citizen of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy it was not his place to join a foreign army. He was imprisoned for this stance. Later, when he was released from prison, war was imminent. At that point the Haudenosaunee joined the rest of the free world in declaring war on the Axis powers. Only then did Ernie join the U.S. Army and fought in the Pacific theatre in the Signal Corps, not as a U.S. citizen but as a Mohawk Nation citizen.

Throughout his life he instilled in his Native students that they are first *Ongwehonweh*, original people whose liberty is a birth right. That legacy trickled down through the many decades and to many of our current leaders in Akwesasne and across the continent. Because of that, we continue to endeavor to persevere even though at times our unity becomes strained.

Ernie's dedication and commitment to Native People will be greatly missed. The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council expresses its sincerest condolences to the family and friends of Elder Ernie Kaientaronkwen Benedict.

#

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