



# St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Wolf Belt Returning to Akwesasne**

#### *Sacred Wampum Belt has Long History*

**Akwesasne Territory** – A wampum belt, commonly referred to as the *Akwesasne Wolf Belt* will be ceremonially returned to the community on September 17, 2010. Wampum refers to the type of shell beads used in these belts. In the late 1800s, Margaret Cook of St. Regis had possession of the belt, but it is not clear how she originally obtained it. Harriet M. Converse purchased the belt from Margaret Cook and later donated to the New York State Museum.

Various interpretations are attributed to belt. “The belt is a covenant of peace and friendship,” remarked Sue Ellen Herne, Program Coordinator of the Akwesasne Museum. “It’s a community belt symbolizing the protection of the community and maintaining its safety.” Two other interpretations are that the belt symbolizes a treaty between the Mohawks and the British or a treaty between the Mohawks and the French. The belt may originate from the time period of 1760 to 1780.

The differing interpretations of the belt may actually be consistent with the belt’s symbolism. Herne said, “The belt is generally understood by researchers within Akwesasne to represent a covenant made by the Native nations along the St. Lawrence River to protect our communities and work together in friendship. Since the belt symbolizes peace and friendship, the belt also could also symbolize the alliances made later between the Mohawks and both the English and French and may have passed back and forth between the parties.”

The belt has horizontal bars at each end, with two animal figures and two human figures clasping hands in the center, a commonly-found motif in Mohawk traditional artistic designs. It has 14 horizontal rows of beads, mainly white, with the designs executed in purple. While this sacred wampum belt is referred to as the Wolf Belt, some debate exists as to whether the animal figures are wolves or dogs. Dogs would represent their role as being watchful of danger and wolves would represent a clan of the Haudenosaunee.

The belt is currently housed at the Peace Tree Mall and will be transported by land to the Ronathanhonni Cultural Center. Arnold, Printup, Historic Preservation Officer for the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, will paddle the lead canoe to transport the sacred wampum belt. He will bring it across the south channel of the Saint Lawrence Seaway from the Ronathanhonni Cultural Center on Cornwall Island to the Akwesasne Cultural Center's museum. The Akwesasne Cultural Center has several events scheduled for Friday, September 17, 2010 to celebrate the return of the belt. They include the arrival of the belt to the museum at 10:30 AM, a keynote speaker at 11:00 am, a traditional lunch, a performance by the Akwesasne Women Singers and a closing by Ernest Benedict. Interested individuals can contact the museum at 518-358-2461 for more information.

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