

# Seneca elder and scholar Mike Myers in Kahnawake

*Planning for the Seventh Generation, lecture on Aboriginal resilience*



COURTESY ROOTS OF RESILIENCE PROJECT

## RICHARD TARDIF THE EASTERN DOOR

Seneca Nation scholar and prominent author Mike Myers will be in Kahnawake, next Friday, at the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center, for the second lecture in a McGill University series on Aboriginal resilience.

Myers, of the Cattaraugus Territory of the Seneca Nation in Western New York, has been active in Indigenous affairs and issues for more than 30 years, beginning with his participation in the occupation of Alcatraz Island, in 1969.

Since 1976, he has been a Grand Council appointed member of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) Land Rights Committee, and is also one of the original co-authors of the International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The idea to invite Myers to speak at the series came to Kahnawákehrónon Morgan Phillips of the Roots of Resilience Project while she and other project members were discussing whom to invite.

Myers was at first speaking only in Kahnawake.

"What happened was that it was suggested by community members for Mike to speak in Mohawk territory, but after witnessing Les Whitbeck in the first lecture, I felt that it was necessary for Mike's knowledge of resilience to be shared also with the non-native academic audience because he has much to

share on culture from our perspectives."

Myers will be speaking in Montreal to a group of researchers later in the afternoon.

From 1988 to 1990, Myers was Program Director of "The

Seventh Generation Fund," an Indigenous foundation and technical assistance organization. During his tenure, the Fund developed a holistic community-based training program to assist local organizers in culturally based planning, implementation and development.

Phillips was completing her undergraduate degree at Concordia University in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology when she was introduced to the Roots of Resilience Project, located at the Jewish General Hospital.

"I was attracted to this project because it focused on the positive aspects of Indigenous people rather than negative aspects of our people," she said.

Phillips explains, "A great deal of the research I have read reports on the detriments and all the negative things about us. But what about the good, and how, in this community, we are so resilient, and why, despite this past research, we are thriving?"

Non-Native researchers often interpreted the data with their perspectives, prejudices, and stereotypes, Phillips said.

"They write things that offend us and do not appropriately reflect what we had to say. But this doesn't always have to be the way that research is conducted; not if Indigenous researchers create our own research projects, or are involved in studies from start to finish."

Since that time, Phillips has become involved with the Roots

of Resilience sub-project involving multiple communities across Canada, called the Stories of Resilience, Healing and Transformation. "We have heard many stories from Aboriginal people about what has helped and hindered healing," she said. "We are recording these experiences so that others in the future may be helped."

To date, focus groups have taken place involving three different age groups within the community of Kahnawake, with the possibility of more taking place.

"We formed a Community Advisory Group to help guide the research, which is made up of four individuals from Kahnawake," Phillips said.

Once all the data has been collected, the research team (consisting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers) along with the Community Advisory Group will study the data and work toward developing ways of sharing the information so as to benefit the community.

Some of those stories (collected from youth, adults and

elders) include The Creation Story, the story of how the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was formed, the Kaienere'ko:wa (The Great Law of Peace) and the introduction of Christianity. Other stories include the creation of the elected Band Council system, the imposition of the Indian Act, and more recently, stories of the eradication of the riverfront, the diminishment of the land base, the Oka Crisis of 1990 and membership issues.

Phillips believes that the knowledge that is being shared with mainstream society can create better understandings of diverse histories.

"It also promotes healing in our communities through these stories of success," she said.

Aboriginal Resilience Lecture Series: *Planning for the Seventh Generation*, Mike Myers, Seneca elder and scholar, will take place on Friday, March 20, 2009, at the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center, in Kahnawake, from 10 a.m. to noon.

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