

TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

The view of the Tappan Zee and Mario Cuomo bridges from Nun's Beach.

## FOWCAS focuses on access and heritage

By Kris DiLorenzo

The Friends of Wickers Creek Archaeological Site (FOWCAS) held their annual meeting on June 20 at the Mead House, home of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society.

The meeting was attended by three special guests — Theresa Johnson, who drove down from her home in Mora-

viantown, in the province of Ontario, Canada, with her daughter Andy Jacob and 5-year-old great-grandson Phillip Doxtator. Johnson, 60, is a member of the Moravian of the Thames Band of the Lenape (Lunaapeew) People of the Delaware Nation, the original inhabitants of an extensive swath of the East Coast, including the Hudson Valley and Manhattan.

Johnson and other residents of Moraviantown visited Dobbs Ferry last May to see Native American artifacts at Village Hall, including items exhibited on the second floor, and to visit the former site of a Native American encampment at Wickers Creek and Nun's Beach, next to the Landing townhouse development.

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# FOWCAS

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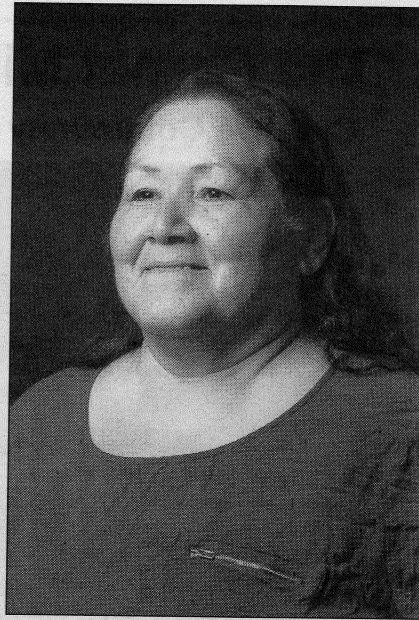
The artifacts and sites reflect the Lenape's presence as far back as 1300 B.C.

At the top of the meeting agenda was the status of two lawsuits — one by FOWCAS and the other by the Village of Dobbs Ferry — against the Landing Homeowners Association (HOA). FOWCAS board member Alan Harris, an attorney, explained that FOWCAS wants to ensure public access to the footbridge, on the Landing's property, that provides the only access to Nun's Beach, by keeping the gate to the footbridge unlocked from dawn to dusk. He is representing FOWCAS along with the Pace University Environmental Litigation Clinic.

The Village contends that the HOA violated a 2000 agreement establishing a conservation easement area near the bridge, by not leaving the area in its natural state. The easement precludes any form of development.

On April 4, the HOA filed a motion to dismiss the FOWCAS case; a conference on the Village's case is set for July 18. Both cases are pending in State Supreme Court in White Plains, before Judge Stan D. Walker.

Nun's Beach was the subject of much discussion during the meeting. In March, the beach was damaged by one of 10 construction barges that a storm set loose from around the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge. The barge



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**Theresa Johnson of the Moravian of the Thames Band of the Lenape.**

uprooted a tree at Nun's Beach and damaged a two-foot high wooden fence built to prevent debris from washing farther up on the beach.

Another issue was Wickers Creek. "We've had problems with furniture, shopping carts, and other debris being thrown into the ravine by the creek," FOWCAS board member and Landing resident Randy Klipstein told the group, "and that area is also a party site, because it's directly behind Dobbs Ferry High

School. Periodically we clean it up."

Klipstein and his cleanup crew, who volunteer on Sundays in warm weather, once found a sofa. "When we pull big items out of the Wickers Creek ravine, we contact the Village DPW... and they go in and take it out," he explained. "They've been great over the years."

Sam Bercovich, who moved from Brooklyn to Dobbs Ferry in 2014, with his wife and child, attended the meeting to express concern about the condition of the artifacts exhibit, and to offer ideas for its future. Bercovich, a librarian at a special education school in Manhattan, is working toward his master of library science, concentrating on archiving and preservation.

"When I came up here I was struck that Dobbs Ferry history isn't visible," he said. "Why is the exhibit in Village Hall where nobody sees it unless they're paying a ticket?"

He mentioned that the exhibit's display case is in direct sunlight that contributes to deterioration. He proposed either relocating the exhibit or creating a second one for another location. He also suggested offering walking tours to show people the village's Native American history.

In a post-meeting interview, Bercovich explained that his interest in Native American cultures and history stems from his childhood in Coney Island. "You just know that Canarsie, where my mother grew up, is named after the Canarsie Indians. As a teenager, I remember going to powwows in Brooklyn."

He now lives on Draper Lane. "My window faces Wickers Creek. I looked out-

side, and I said, 'Something's not right.'"

Some of the Lenape history may be revealed this August. FOWCAS has been invited to participate in the village's annual Road to Freedom Day, which celebrates its Revolutionary War history.

Toward the end of the meeting, FOWCAS president Miriam Sivak used her phone to record video of Johnson and her family introducing themselves; Johnson spoke in Lenape before translating her introduction. The brief video will be added to the FOWCAS website; the attendees agreed that FOWCAS should make more videos of Moravian residents informing viewers about their culture.

Johnson, who has traced her ancestry back to 1781 in Pennsylvania, was pleased with gifts she received on her trip: two arrowheads and old books about the Lenape.

"It was so nice to see the concern of the local people on the history of the area and the lengths they went to try and protect it," she wrote in a subsequent email. "I really enjoyed meeting everyone at the meeting and look forward to attending more."

FOWCAS secretary Tom Morrison commented, "It was great to see some new people who were interested in what we can do to solidify the relationship with the people who came before us. I hope we can build upon that and make improvements on what we have now."

Sivak was succinct in her comment about FOWCAS's legal fight and the organization's future work to preserve the area's Lenape history: "We will persist."