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Niagara Falls Turtle on Track to Become a Historic Landmark



The Turtle faces the falls.

Photo: Radio-Canada / Delphine Jung

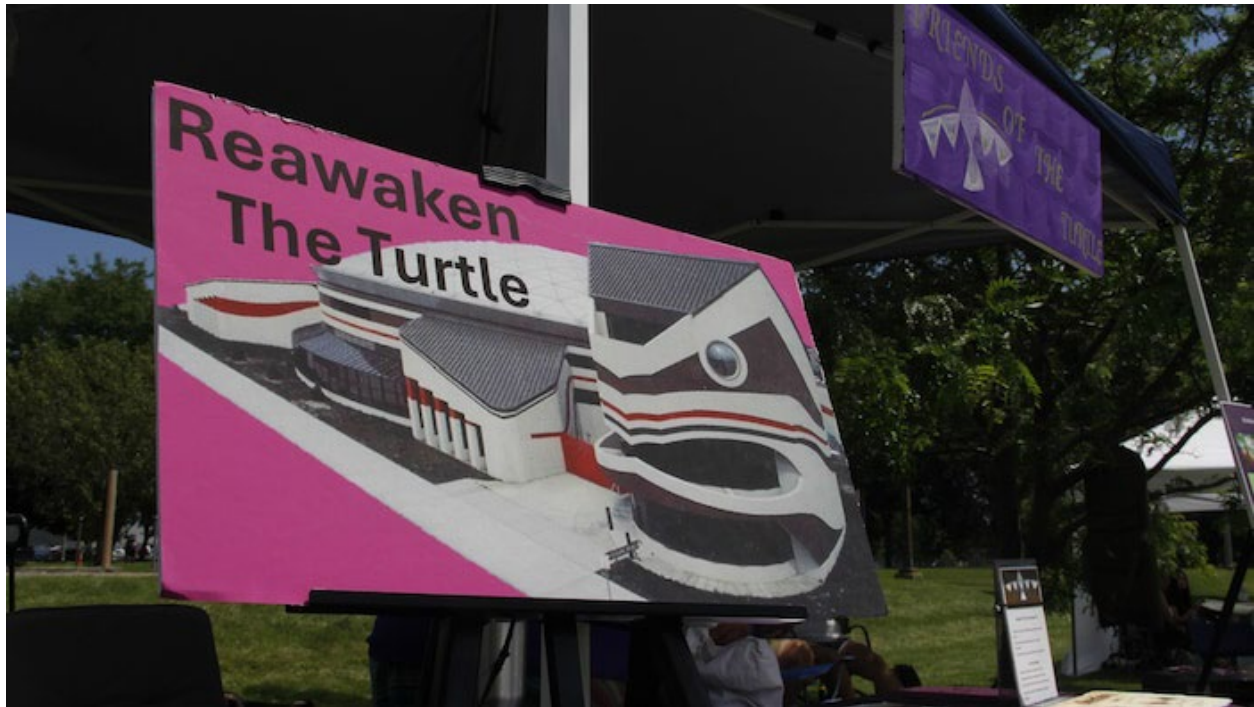
[Delphine Jung](#)

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Indigenous communities in Niagara Falls, on the American side, who [have been fighting for years to protect an ancient](#) turtle-shaped cultural building recently learned that it has been made eligible for the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

The Turtle (Native American Center for the Living Arts) has won a major victory in its ongoing fight for preservation by receiving a determination of eligibility from the Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation , reads a press release from Preservation Buffalo Niagara, an organization dedicated to preserving architectural heritage in Western New York.

The building, which faces the Niagara River and its falls, was a veritable meeting place for thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from the region from 1981 to 1994.



An association, made up of natives and non-natives, is taking shape under the name of "Friends of the Turtle". (File photo)

Photo: Radio-Canada / Delphine Jung

After its closure due to financial problems, the building was purchased in the early 2000s by Niagara Falls Redevelopment, an American real estate company.

Efforts that are beginning to bear fruit

For activists, this news recognizes the cultural and historical importance of the Turtle , we can still read in the press release.

This brings us closer to saving the Turtle. Indigenous people could relearn the culture that was forcibly taken from our elders and ancestors during the residential school era through the Turtle if it were to be reopened , says Shaun Wilson , board chair of Native American Community Services (NACS).

He points out that his daughter, a student of communication and media arts, created [a TikTok account \(New window\)](#) to raise awareness of efforts to wake the turtle .

“As an Indigenous educator, this moment shows my Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who have raised their voices that they cannot be silenced and that fighting for something is worth it ,” says Jessica Forgette, an English teacher at Niagara Falls High School .

Last year, Forgette created the Native American Youth Club after realizing there were about 200 Native students at her school. Several of those students expressed their desire to preserve the Turtle and shared their concerns with the city council last February.

I hope [that the Turtle] will reopen one day so that the Indigenous community and the surrounding community can live in a common space and get to know the land we are on , adds Ms. Forgette.



The once colorful building has been cleaned. (File photo)

Photo: Courtesy Rewaken the Turtle

An excellent example of contemporary indigenous architecture

The decision by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation runs counter to a decision by Niagara Falls City Council earlier this year that the building did not have sufficient historic value.

The council cited in particular the fact that to be classified as a historic monument, New York State law stipulates that the building must be at least 50 years old, which is not the case for the Turtle, whose project began in 1976, 48 years ago.

In its document, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation highlights the architecture of the Turtle and calls it an excellent example of contemporary Native architecture .

Although planning for the project began in 1976 and it has yet to reach the 50-year mark, the building appears to be exceptionally significant due to the relative rarity of its iconic zoomorphic form. The Turtle holds great spiritual significance for the Indigenous community, and the fact that it sits with its head raised to gaze at Niagara Falls further connects it to this sacred place , the institution adds.

This step is far from the last in the process, however, activists stress. The next step requires the building owner to take steps to complete the formal nomination procedure .

Contacted by Espaces Autochtones, the current promoter did not respond to our requests for comment.

To mark the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation 's eligibility determination , activists are organizing an event on September 13 at Cataract House Park , just across the street from the Turtle.