



## A Message from the

## **Nation Representative**

Shekólih. Just a few years ago during a tremendous rain storm we broke ground on what promises to be a transformative development for the Oneida People, the Mary C. Winder Community Center. And on June 28, a day filled with bright sunshine, our community came together to celebrate the opening of this gorgeous 90,000-square-foot facility.

Named in honor of my grandmother, who worked tirelessly throughout her life fighting for the sovereign rights of our People and the return of our sacred homelands, the Mary C. Winder Community Center will now allow us to fulfill Mary's and our ancestors' dream to make a permanent home for our community.

The Community Center is a place where we can honor our most sacred commitment as Oneida and Haudenosaunee people to do all things for the benefit of the Seventh Generation. Here, we will create everything that is needed

#### ONYOTA'A:KA:

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## TOLL-FREE MEMBER PHONE: 1.800.685.6115

NOTE: Council meetings are not being held at this time for health and safety concerns for our Members during the Covid-19 pandemic. Contact: The Oneida Indian Nation, P.O. Box 1, Vernon, NY 13476 or use the Member App. for those to come to continue the long and unending fight for recognition of our sovereignty, our dignity and our legacy.

Nothing will prepare and sustain them for this fight better than the community we have built. It will be the greatest source of their strength and their greatest comfort. Most importantly, it will do for them what Mary Winder and all our ancestors dreamed of by creating a home that cannot be taken and a place to be Oneida in every sense of what that means. A place where they can look to the next seven generations with confidence that all of this will be provided until the end of time.

We could not be more excited for you to experience all the Community Center has to offer. Everything here was created for you, to strengthen you, sustain you and give you every opportunity to make the most of the exceptional potential you hold.

Within the Community Center you will find a library and areas for cultural programming and language education where we will continue to strengthen and pass down the traditions that form the backbone of our community.

There are spaces where Nation Members can enjoy shared meals and special gatherings, the kind of events where generations come together and expand the connections that make our community strong.

You will have access to a gymnasium, running track, fitness center and natatorium with a gorgeous pool that is accessible to all. These facilities are an investment in our health and wellbeing that is critical in a world where Native people continue to experience poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancies than any other group due to historic social and economic disparities. For this reason, the Community Center has been constructed to address our well-being at every level: cultural, mental and physical.

The work of building the Community Center is done, but the work of building our community and continuing its legacy will never end. It must continue for the rest of our lives. We must raise our children to know the importance of doing the same. If we do, the value of this gift will be immeasurable and continue to grow with each Member who comes here.

Thank you to those who were able to join us for our grand opening and for all you have done to help make our community strong and create this incredible place. Thank you for everything we know you will do to continue its growth and make this center all we know it can be.

Na ki' wa, Ray Halbritter Nation Representative

# United States Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland Visits Oneida Indian Nation Homelands

United States Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) made history June 27 when she became the first American Indian Cabinet Secretary to visit the ancestral homelands of the Oneida Indian Nation. Secretary Haaland is the highest-ranking federal executive branch official to ever visit the Oneida homelands.

As Secretary of the Interior, Haaland is responsible for directing the United States' relationship with Indian nations. The Secretary of the Interior also manages all federal lands, including national parks, public lands and wildlife refuges. She also oversees vast federal agencies that include the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management among many others.

During the trip, Secretary Haaland met with tribal leaders including Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter at the Nation's new Mary C. Winder Community Center, where Representative Halbritter provided an update on the Nation's government and economic activities and other federal tribal matters.

"It was an honor to welcome Secretary Haaland and share with her our new Community Center. We are grateful for the opportunity to welcome her to our ancestral homelands, share our latest investment in the success and well-being of our people and discuss other important matters. As the first Native person to serve as a U.S. Cabinet Secretary, her efforts to connect with tribal nations here in New York and across the U.S. are especially meaningful."

- Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter



U.S. Secretary of the Interrior Deb Haaland was presented with a gift of an Oneida Indian Nation Pendleton Blanket by Representative Halbritter during her visit to Oneida homelands on June 27, 2024.

Representative Halbritter also provided Secretary Haaland a tour of the new 90,000-square-foot community center that opened to Nation Members the following day. The Oneida Community Center is among the largest tribal centers of its kind in the United States. A historic investment in preserving and strengthening the Oneida community for generations to come, the Mary C. Winder Community Center was created to support the cultural, social and physical well-being of all Nation Members. ❖



## Bringing a Home for the Oneida Community to Life

When building a vision for the Mary C. Winder Community Center, Oneida Indian Nation leadership sought to create a place where an Oneida community could thrive for generations to come. It's a critical mission that requires the efforts of many dedicated individuals to bring to life. For General Manager Nichola Aregano Diaz (Turtle Clan) and Senior Program Manager Vin Halsey (Wolf Clan), it is also an opportunity to play a role in providing the resources and safe place they both needed as kids and teens.



#### Nichola Aregano Diaz, General Manager

As General Manager, Nichola Aregano Diaz oversees all operations for the Community Center, helping to turn Nation leadership's vision into strategic initiatives. Taking on this role is also a homecoming for Nichola, whose family was among the first to move to the Village of the White Pines when it opened in 1993.

At that time, the land where the Community Center sits today was a cornfield, and Nichola remembers the move as life-changing. "We were urban inner-city kids," she explains. "They flipped us upside down and brought us out here to the country, but it was a great

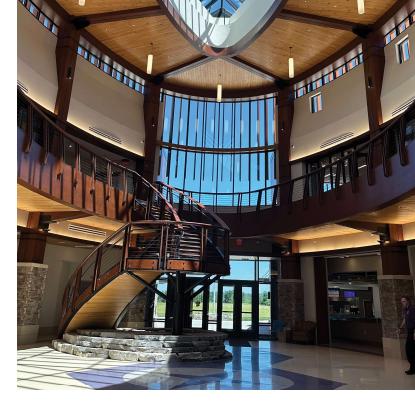
experience."

Even so, at 18 Nichola was ready to leave home and find her purpose. That determination led her to continue the legacy of the Oneida people as America's First Allies by enlisting in the Marine Corps, a decision she made just 45 days after September 11, 2001. During her enlistment, Nichola was stationed on the frontlines in Kuwait as part of one of the first female platoons to serve during Operation Enduring Freedom, which later became Operation Iraqi Freedom. Serving

alongside her fellow Marines gave Nichola an incredible sense of camaraderie and helped her develop the strong leadership skills that would serve her throughout her career.

"The YMCA changed my whole outlook on who I am as a person and what was next for me. What I learned was as long as I can teach people to be great teachers, I can transform more people."

- Nichola Aregano Diaz



Nichola's journey took her in many directions, all of them leading back to fitness and wellness. After leaving the military, she earned a degree in Physical Education for grades K-12 at Coastal Carolina University in South Carolina. Soon after, she and her husband moved to Virginia Beach, where she began working as a teacher and gave birth to their first child. Teaching proved to be not quite the right fit, and Nichola went back to school to earn a Master's degree in Exercise Science at Old Dominion University in Virginia.

Even with her new degree and lifelong love of fitness, Nichola felt her path remained unclear. Her career journey included time as a Physical Conditioning Specialist at Navy Fitness and opening a UFC Gym franchise with partners in

> Virginia Beach. In these roles, clarity about her future began to emerge. What excited her most was the positive physical and emotional impact her work could have on clients.

> During this time, Nichola's life continued to change. Her family welcomed a second child and the split shifts that running a gym demanded became incompatible with day-to-day life. As she looked for the next step, an opportunity presented itself and changed her professional and personal life forever.

In 2017, Nichola accepted a position as a Wellness Director at the YMCA of the

Virginia Peninsulas. The role gave her a unique opportunity to do what she loved most while expanding her positive impact beyond the individual. "The YMCA changed my whole outlook on who I am as a person and what was next for me," Nichola says. "What I learned was as long as I can teach people to be great teachers, I can transform more people. I can have more impact."

Nichola's role at the YMCA was a dream job in many ways. She built strong relationships with her team and watched coworkers' children grow up. She was able to lead the development of mobile community health units that took tools and resources for wellness directly to those who needed them. She also took the lead in efforts to promote the COVID-19 vaccine in predominantly Black communities, where a long history of medical abuse by the government led to skepticism. As her positive impact grew, so did her career and eventually she became the Executive Director of Wellness and Community Health, overseeing 350 team members and 10 Wellness Directors.

Just as she thought her path had reached its destination, a job posting for the General Manager role at the Mary C. Winder Community Center forced her to reconsider. The posting brought to mind a conversation she had with Nation Councilmember Brian Patterson (Bear Clan) many years earlier. When she left home at 18, he assured her that leaving was not a bad thing and that she would eventually return. Several years after their initial talk, she remained uncertain about returning home. Brian still believed that she would.

"He told me leaving was not a bad thing and that the purpose of leaving was so I could bring all the new talents and skills I was developing back to my community," she remembers.

The General Manager role offered a chance to do exactly that. Nichola's sister Trisha urged her to apply, and she did without hesitation. Leaving the YMCA after so many wonderful years wasn't easy, but being part of the Community Center made all the challenges of relocating her family worthwhile. The position also offered interesting new challenges and the chance to use all of the skills she had built throughout the years for the benefit of the Oneida community.

Since joining the Community Center team, it's been clear that Nichola's path has always led here. She has been thrilled to see the community's youth embrace the center and spend time there. "It's a safe place," she says. "I was a kid who needed a safe place, and that's what we want to give back to the community."

As she looks ahead to the fall, Nichola is excited about the programming she and her team are developing in partnership with Nation leadership and Government Programs and Services. There are lots of exciting things on the horizon, and she is looking forward to developing opportunities that complement existing Nation programs and creating an

even greater array of resources, especially for the 18 to 36 demographic. She hopes to follow the model that has built such robust programming for youth and Elders to create new programming for the Nation's young adults.

Ultimately, Nichola wants the Mary C. Winder Community Center to be a place where every Nation Member feels welcome and supported in reaching their fullest potential as individuals and community members. "Everyone is welcome here," she says. "We want you to come and spend time here. People are coming, but I want more people to come and utilize the space for whatever they need."



#### Vin Halsey, Senior Program Manager

Like Nichola, working at the Mary C. Winder Community Center is a homecoming for Vin Halsey as well. The center's Senior Program Manager lived on the territory until he was sixteen, where he played lacrosse and took part in many Oneida Indian Nation programs and services. As he grew older,

he saw some of his peers making the wrong choices for the future and knew he instead wanted to continue his education and make a good life for himself. Vin used that motivation to finish school, set out on his own and enroll at Mohawk Valley Community College.

Vin's college days were hectic times – he and his wife started a family as they attended school, and Vin worked full-time and played lacrosse. Even during these challenges, he always found time for the game he had loved since he was just 10 years old. Vin kept playing as he transferred to Cazenovia College to earn a degree in Design and sees lacrosse as one of the defining themes of his life.

"There is a pattern here," he said when telling his story, "and lacrosse has connected it all. It's the one thing that taught me to commit to something and see it through."

That pattern continued after Vin graduated college. He continued to find great success in the lacrosse industry, taking a job with Powell Lacrosse, doing design work and running travel camps and pop-up clinics across New York State, and managing a Lacrosse Unlimited shop in Syracuse. There, Vin became a mentor to many young local lacrosse players, helping them grow professional skills, teaching them to string sticks and sharing a love for the game. He later held roles with sister

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PG. 6 | SUMMER 2024

Mary C. Winder
Community Center
Grand Opening
Celebration

June 28, 2024





Military veterans Gil Stout (Turtle Clan), U.S. Army, David Ernenwein (Turtle Clan), U.S. Navy, and Nichola Diaz (Turtle Clan), U.S. Marine Corps, proudly rasied the Oneida flag during the opening celebration. Chelsea Jocko (Wolf Clan) receited the Thanksgiving Address in Onyota'a:ká:.



# My grandmother was ahead of her in an age of Garkness who kept the proceed the light, and kept it from being serifice. Now we all are enjoying two own much of it to Mary Cornell - Ray Haibritter Our faith, Region of Cornell and Sept in From Being serifice. Now we all are enjoying two own much of it to Mary Cornell - Ray Haibritter Our faith, Region of Cornell and Sept in From Being series and the series



#### PG. 7 | SUMMER 2024

A display in the first-floor Gallery tells the history of the Oneida People, from the Creation Story through the resurgence of the community today.













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# Oneida Indian Nation Hosts First Lacrosse Exhibition at Mary C. Winder Community Center

Over 400 spectators were in attendance as the Haudenosaunee Fire defeated the Utica Yeti in the new Mary C. Winder Community Center on Oneida Indian Nation homelands

The Oneida Indian Nation created the Mary C. Winder Community Center as a place to support Nation Members in every way. The center and its amenities continue the long-time work of Nation leadership and Oneida Indian Nation Government Programs and Services Commissioner Kim Jacobs (Wolf Clan) to deliver programming that strengthens the individual and the bonds of community. To the delight of lacrosse fans across the Nation, the game has played a special role in carrying out that mission at the Community Center from the very beginning.

On June 29, hundreds of Nation Members gathered to watch the Haudenosaunee Fire take on the Utica Yeti in the Mary C. Winder Community Center Field House. The Yeti couldn't take the heat that Saturday night as the Fire defeated the North American Box Lacrosse League team from Utica 14-8 in the exhibition game.



Levi Confer, Assistant Coach Murray Stout and Al Snow.



The game provided non-stop action from the opening face-off, with most of it coming in front of the Yeti goal.

Levi Confer (Turtle Clan) for the Fire and Al Snow (Onondaga) with the Yeti participated in the ceremonial faceoff before the game. The crowd applauded loudly in anticipation for the game to begin.

Claire Patterson (Wolf Clan) recited the Thanksgiving Address in the Onyota'a:ká: language with both teams lined up on the field – and later provided a traditional closing. Her aunt, Robin Patterson (Wolf Clan), was the official scorekeeper and ran the scoreboard.



Ron Patterson and his sister, Robin.

The players then pumped up the fans as they got set for the opening faceoff.

In what was the inaugural lacrosse game in the new facility, the standing-room-only crowd saw the Fire get off to a hot start behind early scoring from McCoy Abrams (Mohawk) and new Community Center Senior Programs Manager, Vin Halsey (Wolf Clan).

Abrams led the Fire in scoring with six goals while Levi Confer, Dallas Martin (Turtle Clan), Dakota McCann (Turtle Clan), Vin Halsey, Mitch White (Oneida of the Thames), Rioux Johnson (Seneca), Jason Ostune (Seneca) and Cree Cathers (Mohawk) each added one of their own. Al Snow led the Yeti with two goals.

The coaching staff for the Fire – General Manager Ron Patterson (Wolf Clan), Head Coach Ron Cogan (Turtle Clan), Assistant Coaches Murray 'Ace' Stout (Turtle Clan) and Brett Bucktooth (Turtle Clan) – has extensive lacrosse experience, both as players and as coaches.



Ron Patterson explained why lacrosse means so much to him.

"Lacrosse is our ancestral tradition that has been played for hundreds of years by our Haudenosaunee people and given to us by the Creator," he said. "It was my great honor to lead the charge in getting this event organized, but it would've never happened without this new spectacular Community Center and field house."

The state-of-the-art center not only provides a place for the community to play and practice lacrosse, but a place to gather together as well.

Cogan, who has spent much of his career around lacrosse, was happy to see the community come together and support the Fire for their inaugural game.

"Being able to be a part of this game was special," Cogan said. "I've coached many teams, and for me, to come back to Oneida and give everything I can to this community, it meant a lot."

Ron's son, Chace Cogan (Tuscarora), also played for the Fire, which just added to the memorable day.

"Honestly, it was emotional," Ron continued. "We had a great crowd. Chace is sixteen so it was great to see him play

and showcase some of what he can do against the older guys at a high level. He had a blast!"

Vin was beyond proud to play in the game, especially being able to get the win. Afterward, he was able to reflect on what the night meant to him.

"Playing lacrosse in Oneida as a kid 25 years ago played a massive role in who I have become," he said. "It is a full circle moment being a part of the return of lacrosse to our homelands."

After the Fire's victory, Ron Patterson was presented with

the ceremonial faceoff ball by Brett Bucktooth on behalf of the coaching staff and team.

Nichola Aregano Diaz (Turtle Clan), the General Manager of the Community Center, continued her busy weekend by serving as the voice for the team's introductions

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Vin Halsey takes the field during introductions. Vin also designed the logo on the front of the jerseys.





The Haudenosaunee Fire exhibition game coaching staff, left to right: General Manager Ron Patterson, Assistant Coaches Brett Bucktooth and Murray "Ace" Stout and Head Coach Ron Cogan.

#### **Lacrosse Exhibition**

Continued from page 11

and game action. On Friday, June 28, the Mary C. Winder Community Center opened for the first time to Nation Members and their families.

On the following weekend, July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, the Oneida Indian Nation also welcomed the Haudenosaunee Nationals women's box lacrosse team to the field house for two practices. The team conducted a box lacrosse camp on Saturday for Oneida Indian Nation Members, children of enrolled Oneida Members, Oneida Indian Nation Health Services clients and the Oneida Indian Nation community that was attended by a couple dozen kids and their families. It's a fantastic start for the Community Center to see the field house getting busier with an increasing number of lacrosse events.

"We plan to keep the momentum going and are looking into setting up more exhibition games in the near future," Patterson said.

Vin is also excited for what the future will bring.

"Stepping out on the field at the Mary C. Winder Community Center and seeing all the smiles and excitement in this community was a heartwarming experience," he said. "Being part of the Haudenosaunee Fire and to start this new chapter of Oneida history is an honor. I can't wait to keep the momentum going!" \*









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## Opportunities Beyond College Available for Members

The leadership of the Oneida Indian Nation is dedicated to offering Nation Members the resources and support they need to achieve their higher education goals. Equally important to consider, though, are the possibilities around vocational trade and skills training.

A higher education degree significantly enhances opportunities for success in various aspects of life, such as personal finances, health, and overall development. Individuals with bachelor's degrees enjoy considerably higher median lifetime earnings compared to those with only high school diplomas. However, while college can be a valuable path to success, it is just one of the many routes a Nation Member may choose to pursue.

Trade schools, certificate programs (non-vocational), workshops and seminar programs are all viable options for Nation Members who wish to continue their education. Members in good standing who meet certain program requirements are eligible for financial assistance and stipends through the Oneida Indian Nation Education Department's Scholarship Program. The programs must be completed at Nation approved accredited institutions and Nation Members must meet the qualifications and requirements set forth in the Scholarship Program's Policies and Procedures booklet.

The full Scholarship Program Policies and Procedures are available in PDF format on the Oneida Indian Nation website at www.oneidaindiannation.com/scholarship-program/ or on the Nation Member App in the Available Services/Education folder.

Just as with undergraduate and graduate students, certificate and vocational students who demonstrate financial need may qualify for a scholarship award. Students should fill out the Oneida Indian Nation Education Assistance Request form available from the Education Department or online and submit it to the school's Financial Aid Office. The unmet financial need scholarship award will be sent directly to the academic institution in the form of a check. Students who have already met their financial need for tuition assistance are not eligible for scholarship awards to the school, but may still qualify for a stipend award.

At the vocational/technical/trade level, the Nation classifies students carrying 18+ clock hours per week to be full-time and eligible for up to \$6,000 per academic year



in scholarship assistance, and \$4,000 per year in stipends, depending on individual situations set forth in the program guidelines. Vocational/technical/trade students carrying 17 or fewer clock hours per week are considered to be part-time. Oneida Indian Nation clock hour full-time/part-time classifications are based on federal financial assistance guidelines, credit-hour conversions in relation to program length/duration, and other institutional and Nation policy factors.

### What Are Some Good Options?

There are several options available for Nation Members when it comes to trade and vocational training, including the State University of New York (SUNY) system that offers programs such as construction and manufacturing, food service, agriculture, automotive technology, welding and more. Prospective students can visit https://www.suny.edu/trades/ to see what is available across the SUNY system, which also includes apprenticeship opportunities, certificate programs, and associate's programs, among others. The SUNY system includes 64 colleges and universities across the state, including Onondaga Community College, SUNY Morrisville and Mohawk Valley Community College, which specializes in trades and technologies.

With the construction boom happening across Central New York, trade skills are in high demand and the average pay for trades jobs is approximately \$26 per hour. Many apprenticeships also provide students with the ability to earn as they learn, easing the burden of student debt.

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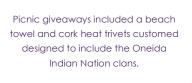
# **Nation Holds Annual Member Family Picnic**

The Oneida Indian Nation hosted its 28<sup>th</sup> annual Nation Member Picnic on a sunny and hot Sunday July 14<sup>th</sup> afternoon! Yawakó: to all of our Nation Members and their families and friends for attending!



























## Bringing a Home for the Oneida Community to Life

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organizations Maverick and Cascade, putting his design skills and lacrosse knowledge to use.

While Vin enjoyed great success with Maverick and Cascade, he was immediately interested when he heard about the Senior Program Manager role at the soon-to-open Mary C. Winder Community Center. He realized it could be the perfect place to put his passion to use in a new way that would bring lacrosse back to the Oneida homelands.

"It seemed like the perfect fit for everything I've done in my life," he said.

Like Nichola, Vin was also drawn to the Mary C. Winder Community Center because he wanted to provide Oneida youth with a safe place to learn about their culture and grow together. "The Rec Center had a major impact on me. I want to help make that impact even greater. Today, my kids and

"The Center is something we probably didn't think we could have 20 years ago. When I look around, I'm just proud to be Oneida and of how far we've come."

- Vin Halsey

my upbringing are what drive me," he explained. "They make me do everything I do now to provide something that I didn't have for everyone in the community."

His job gives him the opportunity to partner with the Community Center

team, Nation leadership and Government Programs and Services to do exactly that. In addition to introducing kids to the game of lacrosse, Vin is excited about the possibility of a program focused on traditional song and dance. As a lifelong dancer, his own interest began with his mother, who worked hard to teach her children to take pride in Oneida culture. "She brought us up speaking the language and proud to be Oneida, and encouraged us to share that through storytelling and dance," he said. Today, he continues to dance and sing at cultural events, and he is eager to offer this gift to the next generation as well.

When he finds a moment during his busy days to step back and watch Nation Members enjoying the Community Center, especially Nation youth, the feeling it brings is overwhelming. "This center is something we probably didn't think we could have 20 years ago," he said. "When I look around, I'm just proud to be Oneida and of how far we've come." \*

## **Oppportunities Beyond College**

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Below are some links to provide more information:

- www.suny.edu/apprenticeship/students/
- www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/ documents/workforce-dev/Occupations-Supported-by-SUNY.pdf

Some local trades offering apprentices include the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW Local 43) that provides skilled workers to more than 40 regional contractors, including many that work with Oneida Indian Nation projects. IBEW Local 43 is in a partnership to provide apprentices in a five-year training program with a Mohawk Valley Community College Electrical Service Technician AOS degree at no cost and an opportunity to earn a Project Management Certificate from Syracuse University, as well as a pathway to transfer into Alfred State College's bachelor's degree program in Business Administration: Technology Management. More information may be found www.ibew43.org.

Another option is the Lineman Institute of the North East, which offers a 500-hour pre-apprentice electrical lineman training program and currently includes a Nation Member in the program. The Institute offers certifications in First Aid and CPR, Pole Top and Bucket Rescue, an OSHA 10-hour construction training certificate, a Commercial Drivers License (CDL) and Digger Truck Operations. More information may be found at www.linemeninstitute.com.

Members can also explore one of the state-wide BOCES Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs to explore the possibilities of working right out of high school or furthering their education. Every BOCES in the state has articulation agreements with colleges and universities that also enable CTE students to earn college credits while still in high school.

Madison-Oneida BOCES located in Verona offers Career Training Courses in healthcare, cosmetology and carpentry, welding, entry-level electrical and other construction courses. The Fall courses begin in August so Members who are interested need to inquire soon by visiting www.moboces.org.

For more information on the Nation's Scholarship Program and potential programs of interest, contact the Education Department at (315) 829-8210. ❖

