



Robbin Obomsawin and her husband, Jules, have been working free as general contractors for the Shinnecock Cultural Museum.
—Colin Grey Photo

Indians Are Seeking Funds To Finish Museum Project

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tion. Their only major source of funds is their annual pow-wow, which must support other programs on the reservation.

Edwin Garrett, president of the museum's board of directors, said the museum can hold a major fund-raiser the first weekend in June, when many Shinnecock who have left the reservation return for a reunion weekend. He said he hopes the museum can be at least functional, if not finished, by then.

Mr. Garrett noted that funds are also required to run the museum once the building is completed. For that reason, the museum will probably charge a small admission and include a gift shop, he said. The museum would also apply for grants to fund its operations.

The board decided to go ahead with the building hoping that the project would spark outside interest and also bring outside donors. They also had the opportunity to enlist the aid of the Obomsawins, who have been working in log construction for 19 years.

Architect Campion A. Platt of Southampton and Manhattan has been working for free on the project for two years. Mr. Platt and the Obomsawins came up with a plan for the museum similar to one used for a cultural mu-

seum that the couple built on the Oneida reserve in upstate New York seven years ago. Ms. Obomsawin's husband is an Oneida.

The work by the Obomsawins would normally cost \$66,000. Mr. Platt's service are worth \$87,000. The museum has received \$56,460 worth of in-kind contributions from a variety of other professionals, of which local businesses account for \$17,500.

Clifford Gibbons of Island Stonecrafters in Islip Terrace spent seven days working on a stone retaining wall that will enclose a lecture and garden area behind the museum. Mr. Gibbons said he donated his time because of a "personal feeling toward American Indians."

Mr. Gibbons said he found the different contributions by laborers inspiring, but he also criticized the smaller contributions coming from locals. "I think it's sickening, especially with the amount of money that's here, especially in the Hamptons area," Mr. Gibbons said.

Donations can be sent to the Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center & Museum, Shinnecock Indian Reservation, Post Office Box 5059, Southampton, New York 11969. For more information, go to the museum's web site at <http://red-owl.com>.

Tribal Museum Needs a Boost

By Colin Grey

When members of the Shinnecock Indian nation decided to start building a Shinnecock Cultural Museum in Southampton last fall with only one-third of the projected cost for the building on hand, the board of directors did not know where they would get the money to finish. Six months later, they still don't and construction is grinding to a halt.

The board of directors needs to raise several hundred thousand dollars more to complete the project. Although the project has benefited from hours of donated labor, materials to complete the structure must be purchased and paid for.

Work on the museum, a white pine log structure that has been rising on the south side of Montauk Highway, just east of Southampton College, came to a halt this week. Elizabeth Haile, secretary of the board, said the work stoppage was just temporary.

But the museum is about \$400,000 short of the projected \$588,000 construction cost and \$70,000 in debt for materials already used, according to contractor Robbin Obomsawin of Beaver Creek Log Homes.

Furthermore, Ms. Obomsawin said the museum is already heavily in debt for construction materials. The most telling evidence of the shortfall is the tar paper that now tops the building instead a proper roof.

And time may be running out. The Obomsawins, whose year-round business is based in the Oneida Territory in central New York State, must move on to their next project at the end of March, Ms. Obomsawin said. They have been working on the museum since last September preparing logs for the construction.

By Southampton standards, the structure is relatively small: a one-story, 5,400-square-foot building with a 2,700-square-foot footprint. A dream of a handful of nation members for 21 years, the building will house a "living museum" where the Shinnecock hope to recount their 3,000-year-old history with photographs, documents, artifacts and demonstrations. The grounds will be landscaped with plants indigenous to the area.

Like many involved with the project, Ms. Obomsawin and her husband, Jules, have worked for free. An initial \$200,000 grant from the Mashantucket Pequots

in Connecticut and the donated professional services of the Obomsawins and others have sustained the project thus far.

"Every day we're just about ready to give up when somebody else walks through the door," Ms. Obomsawin said last week.

For instance, when it looked as if there would be no more money to feed the volunteer workers, Shinnecock senior citizens came forward with money to pay for their lunches, she said.

But apart from Pequot grant, a \$500 contribution from the Shinnecock senior citizens, and a \$5,000 gift from the Golfers Association of Shinnecock, no one has come forward with significant money contributions, Ms. Haile said. The museum has held one fund-raising event, a dinner at Basilico restaurant in Southampton.

"We have no safety net. We have faith," Ms. Haile said. "We have gone halfway and people have to see that we need a hand. We need a roof."

Unlike public building projects on non-reservation land, the Shinnecock nation cannot float a bond and tax nation members to pay for construction.

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A shortage of funds has left tar paper instead of shingling covering the new Shinnecock board of directors still needs \$400,000 to finish the building.