

Artpark & Company honors Indigenous culture at Strawberry Moon Festival

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Artpark & Company honored this nation's first settlers on Saturday as part of its annual Strawberry Moon Festival. Programming at the Lewiston state park was designed to encourage unity across all communities, while spotlighting the significant contributions the Native American people have made to the River Region.

The event was held in the area in and adjacent to Emerald Grove, across the lower park green space overlooking the Niagara River, and up to the Native American Peace Garden. Patrons could shop at a festival marketplace, learn about Indigenous culture, and watch myriad musical and dance presentations. Later in the evening, performances moved to the "Niagara 1979" "Painted Parking Lot."

Curator Michele-Elise Burnett (Métis/Algonquin, Bear Clan), Artpark & Company's Indigenous arts producer, said, "These lands are traditionally the lands of our Indigenous peoples and our ancestors who have walked here before us. So, coming full circle of working together in peace and friendship and respect, it just brings us a beautiful marriage, I think, of having the western world working with our Indigenous peoples and establishing ongoing programming, so that we're working together - that we're walking together."

The Strawberry Moon Festival began in 2019 and, "I feel that, every year, it has been growing," Burnett said "It's just that people are very interested to learn more about who we are, and we are very interested in sharing our knowl-



edge, our traditions, our culture, so that people understand who we were pre-contact, what we've gone through during contact, to understand who we are today.

"This festival is to unite all of us. It's to bring us together in friendship and to share our diverse cultures together. But also, to build those relationships, so that we can strengthen our cross-cultural future together, and to build a stronger future - and one that is filled with pride and respect for the next set of generations.

"These are the festivals - these are ground-roots festivals - that really bring all the nations - everyone, all walks of life - together."

Celebrating the Native Ameri-



can people is something that has become important to Artpark & Company President Sonia Kozlova Clark. She recently shared, "I have discovered the incredible depth and richness of the Haudenosaunee and their predecessors."

Working in partnership with

Burnett, board member Seymour Knox IV, and the Lewiston Council on the Arts, "With their help, some reading, and the stories told by Neil Patterson Sr. of the Tuscarora Nation, or Peter Jamison of the Seneca Nation, and many others, I learned that the Haudeno-



saunee Nations are in themselves very diverse, but also so present here," Clark said. "Their presence here is not always the most obvious, as we see them through the limited focus of shared festivals or events, but the reality is so much richer.

"Through the work of Michele-Elise, Artpark's Indigenous arts producer and staff member, our relationship has been flourishing now for a number of years, starting with the Artpark Strawberry Moon Festival and expanding now to a summer-long program focused on Indigenous ways of knowing. I am grateful to Kehala and Jordan Smith and all the scholars and artists helping us build a more close-knit relationship, which sometimes feels like family.

"The success of attracting an audience is through seeing your community, all its fine tones and different shades of cultural and economic differences, social and even political views. And for us at Artpark, there is such an interesting palette to work with here."

Burnett said, "Artpark's Indigenous programming came back, had a revitalization, after 40-plus years of not being existent here. That's when I came on board. It's something that's really special to be able to bring this back and have an ongoing programming, as well as having our community come here, and be with everyone, and to feel like they're part of building that future."



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