



TFA Monthly Newsletter

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IN THE NEWS

Upstate New York Village Does the Right Thing

by Jeff Heimann

In a welcome move by nearly all observers, the Village of Whitesboro, a small town in upstate New York, is changing its official seal after renewed attention by many labeled it a racist emblem. The original seal, which was created in the early 1900s, depicted a white man – Hugo White, the village founder and for whom the town was named – appearing to be strangling a Native American.

As recounted on Whitesboro's official website, the seal actually "depicts a friendly wrestling match that helped foster good relations between White and the Indians." According to more information on the event, White was challenged to this wrestling match by an Oneida Indian – one of "rather athletic form" as compared to White who was "out of practice" and "felt con-

scious of [his] personal strength" – and White concluded that if he were to lose, that would be the lesser of two evils (with the other evil being acquiring the reputation of a coward he would have faced by declining the challenge).

White accepted the challenge and "by fortunate trip, succeeded almost instantly in throwing him." As such, the wrestling match that occurred between White and the Oneida in fact sealed a lasting friendship and confidence, one that helped foster better relations between the Oneida people and their new neighbors – a relationship not conveyed in the town seal.

Whitesboro's seal has been the subject of debate for more than 55 years – the village was sued by a Native American

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Above: David Howard (left) and Kristi Jackson (right) at the Ho-Chunk Gaming Black River Falls Casino in January.

Federal Status of Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe's Land Now Official

1/09/16 – CapeCodeTimes.com

Buffalo Casino Expansion Driven by Amenities

1/14/16 – BuffaloNews.com

Turning Stone Casino to Add Hundreds of Jobs with Retail Expansion

1/15/16 – OneidaDispatch.com

Major Economic Development Projects Underway for Three Native Nations

1/25/16 – ICTMN.com

Puyallup Tribe Plans Pot Testing Lab

1/27/16 – TheNewsTribune.com

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group in the 1970s. While this led to a slight modification of the seal (White's hands moving down from the neck area down to the shoulders, for a more accurate depiction of a wrestling match), anyone seeing the seal for the first time would still be hard-pressed to not label it as a racist emblem. Earlier this year, the Village Voice reminded the world that Whitesboro's seal remains offensive, leading to a public outcry which prompted a vote amongst Whitesboro's residents to change the seal. However, the fewer than ten percent of residents that participated in the election, voted 157 to 55 to not change the current seal.



The crux of the conflict here is similar to many situations across the country. A small, stubborn few holding fast to an offensive emblem to which they maintain in its roots of creation is not

racist, but rather a preservation of a positive part of history. After the vote, the Village of Whitesboro deservedly received even more negative attention – in part because of the ridicule imposed on the Village of Whitesboro on a recent episode of Comedy Central's "The Daily Show". Interestingly, in a village board meeting and in the days that followed the vote, many residents that had supported keeping the seal in an homage to history voiced their support to have the seal redrawn in a more culturally appropriate way. In a sense, many admitted a degree of ignorance by focusing on what the emblem meant to them rather than opening

their eyes up to how the emblem could be interpreted by others.

In an about face, the village will be changing their seal: the Mayor of Whitesboro recently announced that, together with the Oneida Indian Nation, they will create a new emblem for the village's seal. As we enter the week leading to Super Bowl 50, one cannot but help to think of the significantly more publicized and more offensive analogy that continues with Washington D.C.'s NFL team, its owner Daniel Snyder and another stubborn group. Let's all hope this group will soon come to their senses as well.



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