



Great Barrington Community to Observe Indigenous Peoples' Day

Four events highlight community, education, ceremony, and integration

Drumming, traditional Native American songs, speeches, and a procession culminating in a ceremonial blessing of the Housatonic River will mark the local observance of Indigenous Peoples' Day in Great Barrington on Monday, October 11 2021.

This will be the centerpiece of a four-event program organized by Alliance for a Viable Future, a local grass-roots organization. The aim is to acknowledge and heal the wounds of our past, honor the Native American ethic of respect and care for the natural world, and integrate indigenous values into our response to climate change, according to Lev Natan, organizer and founding director of the Alliance.

"The commemoration is inspired, in part, by Randy Weinstein and Gwendolyn VanSant of the W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Committee, who, in 2019, asked the Town of Great Barrington to join a growing movement of towns, cities and states around the country who are recognizing the second Monday of October as Indigenous Peoples' Day," said Natan.

The Oct. 11th event will begin at the Gazebo behind Town Hall at 11:00am with Aaron Athey, the Master of Ceremonies for powwows in the Berkshires, playing his drum and singing traditional songs.

Several speakers will discuss the significance of the day including:

- Shawn Stevens, tribal member of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican nation, who has established links with our community and shared his ceremonial knowledge for many years
- Jake Singer, Navajo Medicine Man, activist for Native American Veterans, and Sundance Chief, who participated in the local event last year
- Dennis Powell, President of the NAACP-Berkshire County Branch, who will speak about the value of solidarity among all peoples.

From the gazebo, the gathering will proceed down Main St. to the RiverWalk via Dresser Ave. It will continue to the Memorial Park baseball field, where a ceremonial blessing for the Housatonic River will also honor the ongoing legacy of the people who were displaced by the colonists.

The program's kickoff , "Building-Community: Equinox Campfire & Potluck", will take place on September 23, from 6:00 - 8:00pm, at the April Hill Education and Conservation Center and Greenagers headquarters in South Egremont, with an optional guided hike from 4:00 - 5:30.

The second event, "Listening Deeply: Indigenous Voices Panel Discussion," aims to educate our community in preparation for Indigenous Peoples' Day. It is scheduled for Friday, October 1st from 6:00-8:00pm at the Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire in Housatonic, in person and on Zoom. Shawn Stevens, Jake Singer, Bonney Hartley, from the Mohican Cultural Affairs Office, and Carol Dana, a Penobscot Language Master have been invited to speak on the panel.

The fourth and final event, "Moving Forward Together: Integration & Next Steps Workshop," will take place on Sunday, October 17 from 1:30 - 4:30 pm, also at the Unitarian Universalist meeting house in Housatonic.

"The purpose of this entire program, a four-event series that stretches from September 23rd thru October 17th, is to establish a deep connection with the indigenous history of our place. By acknowledging this part of our past, we are able to bring healing to our community, in the present, and move forward into the future, with greater trust and unity," says Natan.

True to its name, the Alliance for a Viable Future is building local support and participation by working with the Berkshire Food Coop, Mahaiwe Theatre, Sacred Oak Homes, Big Elm Brewery, NAACP-Berkshire County Branch, and grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, through five local councils (Great Barrington, Monterey, New Marlborough, Stockbridge and West Stockbridge); and the Christopher Reynolds Foundation. New sponsors and partnerships are being sought to make this an annual program with coordinated events in communities throughout the Northeast bioregion.

All events are family friendly and open to all. For planning purposes, event coordinators are asking people to register for each event separately. But no one will be turned away. Visit www.allianceforaviablefuture.org for further details and to register. For more information and to request interviews with key participants, kindly contact Lev Natan, at lev@allianceforaviablefuture.org.