

Sakokwenionkwas (Dr. THOMAS PORTER)

Elder and Spiritual Leader
Bear Clan of the Mohawk Nation

Thomas R. Porter (Sakokwenionkwas “The One Who Wins”) has been the founder, spokesperson and spiritual leader of the Mohawk Community of Kanatsiohareke (Ga na jo ha lay gay) located in the Mohawk Valley near Fonda, New York since 1993. He is a member of the Bear Clan of the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne. (Akwesasne, also known as the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation, straddles the New York State/Canadian border near Massena, New York.) He is married to Alice Joe Porter who is Choctaw. They have six children.

Mr. Porter; held the position of sub-chief for the Tehanakarine Chieftainship title, one of the nine chief titles of the Mohawk Nation, for 21 years (1971-1992). Chiefs are considered to be spiritual as well as political leaders. Some of the duties of that position were: officiating at marriage ceremonies, death ceremonies and numerous other traditional ceremonies held throughout the year.

He was the director of and a teacher at the Akwesasne Freedom School and taught at the Kahnawake Survival School. He taught Mohawk language, philosophy and history at both schools as well as carpentry at Kahnawake. The purpose of both schools is to teach all of the usual subject matter, but within a traditional Mohawk worldview and with emphasis on keeping the Mohawk language alive and vital. It is said that with the loss of language, there also is the loss of at least 50% of a people’s culture and identity.

Mr. Porter worked as secretary for the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs for 8 years and as interpreter for 11 years. He is still called on to help out as needed, when his schedule allows.

Mr. Porter organized the “White Roots of Peace”, a traveling multi-media communications group designed to revitalize Native traditions and beliefs in North America. He was the main speaker and lectured for the group at various universities and colleges all over the United States and Canada.



Mr. Porter was the Native American consultant for the New York State Penitentiary System and Chaplain for all of the Native inmates in the New York State Penal System for 10 years. His office was located in Albany, New York, but he traveled all over the state to meet with Native inmates. He conferred with them, taught and helped them conduct traditional ceremonies.

Mr. Porter has authored various books and pamphlets, all of which teach about Mohawk traditions and spirituality. Most of them are available through the Craft Store at Kanatsiohareke. They are:

- Tsiniionkwarihotons
- Clanology
- O:nenhste (Corn)
- Drum and Rattlemaking
- Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen (The Thanksgiving Address)
- Mohawk Marriage
- Traditional Mohawk Clothing
- Akwesasne Mohawk Social Dances
- Kanatsiohareke: Traditional Mohawk Indians Return to Their Ancestral Homeland
- And Grandma Said...
- Nobody Can Do It Better Than Warisosa

Many have recognized and applauded Mr. Porter for his work. He has won numerous awards:

- 1981 Rothko Chapel Award for commitment to truth and freedom. Rothko Chapel is an international organization based in Houston, Texas.
- 1992 Human Rights Award, Earth Action. "In gratitude for your outstanding service and love on behalf of our world."
- 1992 Cornell University, "American Indian Millennium 2001 – Cornell University recognizes Tom Porter for his dedication to the protection of Native lifeways."
- 1992 The Twenty-First Gamaliel Chair in Peace and Justice Award, which "recognizes individuals who dedicate their lives to the pursuit of peace and justice". Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It states that Tom Porter "serves as an exemplary role model displaying courage, sensitivity and ambition giving selflessly of his time, energy and intellect to improving the welfare of the Mohawk nation," He "personifies the finest attributes of leadership and integrity."

(This award is given once a year to someone in the world who is then asked to spend a month hosting dinners, giving speeches and answering questions about, in this case, Native spirituality.)
- 1993 NYS Division of the Budget – Striving For Unity in Diversity.
In appreciation for your participation in the Native American Heritage Month Program
- 1999 Indian of the Year Award for outstanding contributions to Native people and for the betterment of all people. Thunderbird American Indian Dancers, an organization based in New York City, dedicated to promoting cultural awareness and raising scholarship funds for Native scholars.
- 2001 Honored by Lotus Music and Dance. New York, New York. For his "Lifelong and tireless efforts to keep the spiritual traditions, language and culture of the Longhouse People, vital and alive."

- 2003 Bergen County College Native American Heritage Award, "In recognition of your contributions to Native American Heritage and to enhance intercultural understanding."
- 2003 Sweetgrass First Nations Language Council, "In recognition of your life's work in your language."
- 2005 Cayuga Correctional Facility, "The Haudenosaunee Community presents Sakokwenionkwas, "The One Who Wins", with this certificate of appreciation. Our deepest appreciation goes out to you for your religious instructions and insight provided at many ceremonies which teaches us the value and importance of the oral tradition as People of the Longhouse."
- 2006 Traditional Arts in Upstate New York - North Country Heritage Award, "for mastery of and creative commitment to local traditions, customs and arts and for dedication to community and to the teaching of others."
- 2009 American Indian Community House, New York City, "The Board of Directors of American Indian Community House Inc. wishes to express our sincere gratitude for your service and dedication to American Indian and Alaska People. We, at our Honoring the Spirit Event, do hereby resolve to recognize and honor the spirit by which you, Tom Porter, have given so much by way of culture, promotion and preservation."
- 2009 Trent University in Peterborough, Canada conferred upon Thomas R. Porter an honorary Doctor of Laws degree for his contributions as an Indigenous cultural educator, Elder and Spiritual Leader.
- 2012 Native American Indian Education Association of New York presents this award to Sakokwenionkwas, Tom Porter for his lifetime dedication to maintaining the Mohawk language and the traditional teachings of the Haudenosaunee people.
- 2017 Doctor of Humane Letters presented by Syracuse University, NY
- 2017 Doctor of Humane Letters presented by Keene State College, NH

Additional information contact Kay Olan by phone: 518-584-9270 or email: ionataiewas14@hotmail.com

Dr. Porter will deliver the keynote address entitled "*The Spirit of Two Great Rivers - The Susquehanna and Delaware*" at 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Friday, November 10, 2017 in the Forum, Elaine Langone Center, Bucknell University

Dr. Porter will deliver a plenary address entitled "*The Spirit of Water*" at 10:15 - 10:45 a.m. on Saturday, November 11, 2017 in the Forum, Elaine Langone Center, Bucknell University