



PRESS RELEASE

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Hartford Public Library To Hold Event “Revisiting Thanksgiving and Celebrating The Green Corn Festival” November 23

HARTFORD – Hartford Public Library is offering the opportunity for people to re-learn the history around Thanksgiving and celebrate Native American customs and culture.

The event, called “Revisiting Thanksgiving, and Celebrating the Green Corn Festival” will take place Monday, November 23, from 6:00 pm – 7:15 pm via Facebook Live.

Many Americans celebrate Thanksgiving as the peaceful breaking of bread between Native people and European settlers, but what really happened? And what are the Indigenous origins of Thanksgiving pre-colonization? Hear Indigenous perspectives on Thanksgiving, and learn about historically practiced and current day Indigenous harvest celebrations, including the Green Corn Festival.

“We at Hartford Public Library recognize ‘the danger of a single story’ to quote author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and that we should always seek more opportunities to hear more stories, perspectives, and histories to deepen our understanding of ourselves and our neighbors. Thanksgiving is an opportunity for us to hear Indigenous stories in particular, and to look more closely at the roots of this American holiday,” said Liz Castle, HPL’s programming manager.

The panel will feature Natasha Gambrell of the Eastern Pequot Tribe, Kyle Lamphere of the Narragansett Tribe, Yvonne Matthews of the Cree Tribe, Melissa Wesaw of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, and other local Indigenous voices and performances.

For Pat Kelly, one of the event organizers, this is an opportunity to turn the Thanksgiving narrative away from its Eurocentric focus and towards a greater understanding of the complexities of the relationship between Native Americans and the Pilgrims.

“It’s heartbreaking as a Native American to see how things have been filtered,” said Kelly, president and CEO of Ebony Horsewomen.

The simple, accepted narrative of the holiday is that the Native Americans helped the Pilgrims survive a harsh winter and the two groups celebrated with a meal. The reality is more nuanced, Kelly said. The spread of disease and the harsh colonization efforts on the part of the Pilgrims make the true story a grim one for Native Americans.

Kelly wants to shed light on the Green Corn Festival, an ancient Native American celebration. In addition to the panel discussion, there will be music, poetry, and dance. She wants to show that there is more to Native American life in Connecticut than legends and casinos. "It's time for the Native Americans to come forward," Kelly said.

For more information about Hartford Public Library, visit hplct.org.

Panelist Bios

Yvonne D. Matthews

Yvonne D. Matthews, native of Hartford CT. Employed by Urban League of Greater Hartford and serves as an Elder with a team of Ministers and Elders under the leadership of Overseer Kenneth Moales Jr. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bridgeport, CT. Yvonne is the owner of My Majesty's Royal Collections LLC, (A lingerie business) and the leader of Love Foundation Ministries. Yvonne has been told by her maternal elders that she comes from the Creek Indian Tribe/GA. Yvonne has a deep passion for the wellbeing of all people. She believes and lives "everything you need to fulfill your purpose for living is within you" We must serve, respect and live without fear.

Melissa Wesaw

Melissa Wesaw is a member of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation located in Kent, Connecticut. She graduated from Rivier College with my B.A., then attended PLSI in Albuquerque, New Mexico and obtained a law degree at Michigan State University College of Law. After law school she worked as an attorney on the Wind River Reservation as a public defender and a prosecutor for child support. She now lives in Connecticut with her husband and children.