

Friday, July 25, 2003

For Immediate Release

Contact: Dwight Bachman, Public Relations Officer
(860) 465-5114 <Bachman@easternct.edu>
Andres Hidalgo, Public Relations Assistant
(860) 465-5735 <hidalgoa@stu.easternct.edu>

Discovering a Rich Past

By Andres Hidalgo

This summer, fourteen students from seven universities are enjoying an exceptional Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) educational opportunity in an unusual setting. The ECSU Archaeological Fields School, presently in its ninth year, is conducted in partnership with the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut. This year, the 'classroom' is Shantok: Village of Uncas in Uncasville, CT, which is situated on the Mohegan Reservation.

The students are acquiring hands-on experience in archeological methods while conducting excavations at Mohegan historic sites ranging from hundreds to many thousands of years old. The program, which is commonly attended by students from all over America, international students and Native American students, is provided through Eastern's School of Continuing Education. This year, nine of fourteen students are Native Americans. These projects help the Mohegan Tribe supplement its rich oral tradition through archaeological investigations and archival research.

Shantok, also known as Fort Shantok, served as one of the principal Mohegan villages during the mid-seventeenth century when the tribe controlled most of

--MORE--

Mohegan Field School at ECSU Page-2

southeastern Connecticut. The original Mohegan Reservation, one of the earliest in North America, is much smaller today than when it was originally established in the 1660's. It included at least two fortified villages, three tribal burial grounds, numerous homesteads, the Mohegan church, and many other as yet undiscovered sites that promise to tell us much about the lives of Mohegan people through time.

Among the program's most important discoveries was the discovery, using state-of-the-art ground-penetrating radar, of a missing Mohegan burial ground. The field school has also recovered artifacts as old as 6000-7,000 BC and encountered many previously unknown sites.

Dr. Jeffrey Bendremer, who has directed the field school for the past eight years, is the staff archeologist for the Mohegan Tribe Historic Preservation Department. This year, the student group is concentrating on the search for the northern fortification at Shantok. The western and southern palisades are known from previous archaeological work done during the 1960's. With a third fortification, Bendremer will be better able to estimate the size of the village during the seventeenth century, as well as how many structures the village could accommodate and, thus, how many people could have lived there.

From 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday throughout the summer, students get a chance to conduct archaeological research. "You actually become an archeologist," says Bendremer. "The field school provides a forum for the training of conscientious, respectful, and insightful archaeologists. Students learn correct

--MORE--

archaeological techniques and methods, but they also learn to interact respectfully with tribal members.” A departure from traditional university-based archaeology, all finds remain the property of the Mohegan Tribe. Bendremer and his staff will spend more than six months in the laboratory analyzing the artifacts discovered by this year’s field school students.

Students earn six graduate or undergraduate credits during the six-week program. In addition to the fieldwork, graduate students (there are four grads this year) must complete an individual project of their choosing. Students are admitted into the field school in May through an application process. “It is a good opportunity for a graduating senior to get a jump on their graduate work,” Bendremer declared, “and it’s a lot of fun too.”

PHOTOS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST- CAPTIONS

-Jeff Bendremer, center, talks with Melissa Merritt, left, and Arielle Muth, right. The stones might represent the northern-most wall of the village.

###

Eastern Connecticut State University is part of
the Connecticut State University (CSU) System.