Located in the small town of Victor, New York, and tucked into the hill and set east to west within the natural landscape to minimize its visual and environmental impact, the new Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan will transform the visitor experience at Ganondagan State Historic Site thanks to greater capacity and year-round capability. The Ganondagan State Historic Site is located on what once was a large 17th-century Seneca town, which was ruined by the French in 1687 in a dispute over the fur trade.

Long a personal vision of Ganondagan State Historic Site Manager G. Peter Jemison, the $15 million project was made possible with the help and support of the Friends of Ganondagan Board of Trustees Building Committee, the Seneca Nation, the Tonawanda Senecas, the Haudenosaunee, New York State, the Rock Foundation, the Thaw Charitable Trust, Ongweoweh Corporation and additional corporate and private donations. The Center allows Ganondagan to take its place as a vital educational, historical, cultural and tourist destination, spreading its message of a living culture of peace to regional, national and international visitors.

From the parking lot, visitors wind their way, “Along the Thistles Path” dotted with carved stone markers to create a sense of anticipation.

Culturally significant traditional fire and water elements on the front plaza serve as a welcoming transition for visitors, and the admissions >>
entry bisects the length of the rect-angular-shaped building and features a multi-media depiction of the Seneca Ganonyok (Thanksgiving address), or "words that come before all else." The pathway to the Bark Longhouse connects directly through the entryway.

The nearly 3,000 square feet of interactive gallery space features the permanent story of Ganondagan as well as changing exhibits conveying the story of the Seneca and Haudenosaunee people. Fifteen exhibits with nearly 300 objects cover five centuries of artistic, archaeological, cultural and historical artifacts, including works from many contemporary Native artists. The gallery also features a major exhibit on the Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse team and a substantial 10-foot scale model of the Bark Longhouse. This is especially beneficial during the winter when that structure is closed.

With its flexible, roll-out theater seating and sprung floor, the auditorium will be used for year-round events, performances and exhibits. Many will be programs offered by the Friends of Ganondagan such as lectures, films, concerts and multimedia events, but it will also be available for community use.

Two classrooms and an orientation theater for video experiences enable learners of all ages to have a more immersive, interactive experience. Highlighted in the orientation theater is the new, award-winning, Iroquois Creation Story, a live action/animated film collaboration among Friends of Ganondagan, Ganondagan State Historic Site, Garth Fagan Dance, Iroquois Social Dancers, Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Film & Animation and composer Brent Michael Davids. Future plans include facilities for distance learning-including audio-visual capabilities-to expand Ganondagan's global impact.

A catering kitchen provides the opportunity to serve food for events and expand workshop offerings to include more about food and nutrition, especially focusing on the Iroquois White Corn Project. The kitchen will also be available for community event use.

The gift shop features offerings of Seneca and Haudenosaunee artworks, jewelry, books and gifts relating to Ganondagan, as well as Iroquois White Corn Project products.

The 17,300 square foot building has a focus on sustainability, including geo-thermal technology for heating and cooling to reduce the building's environmental impact. The building design conforms to requirements for LEED certification, which designates sustainable design, construction, operations and maintenance strategies to reduce the building's initial and long-term environmental impact.

The Seneca Art & Culture Center will bring increased economic benefits to the area. A 50% increase in visitors beyond the current 35,000 is anticipated within three years of opening.

The design is by Francois de Menil Architects and the architect of record is DeWolff Partnership Architects. The Center was built by the Rochester-based Pike Company, the construction managers.

As their website notes, “one of our foremost missions is to share information and teach about the Haudenosaunee, not only in a historical sense, but also as the Haudenosaunee people live today. The information we share spans a wide variety of topics including culture, history, art, the natural world, food and more. We hope you enjoy as well as learn.”

The Center is open year round, Tuesday to Sunday, 9 to 5, with exhibit hours running 10 to 4:30. The Center is closed on all major holidays. The Longhouse is open May 1st to October 31st. More information is available at ganondagan.org.