

F I L M

Native Americans to Star in the Hamptons



left, a scene from "Native American Neighbors," submitted to the Hamptons International Film Festival by the Shinnecock Nation. Also showing at the festival will be "Is the Crown at War With Us?" about the Mi'gmaq fishermen of New Brunswick, Canada.

By JULIA C. MEAD

WHEN the Hamptons International Film Festival opens on Wednesday, its program will include, for the fourth consecutive year, a few offerings by independent Long Island filmmakers in the "View From Long Island" series. For the first time, that series will give voice to issues of concern to local Native Americans in a 17-minute documentary, "Native American Neighbors," submitted by the Shinnecock Nation, which has its reservation in Southampton.

The film tells the story of a nonprofit group, the Padoquohan Medicine Lodge Fellowship, founded by Shinnecock women to provide assistance to poor tribe members. It does not mention the tribe's legal battle to build a casino on a 79-acre parcel in Southampton Bays, an effort vehemently opposed by many other residents of the East End.

But its message — that the group must become self-sufficient — echoes arguments used by Shinnecock leaders who say the casino would provide jobs for tribe members while its profits would help pay for health services, housing, and educational and cultural programs.

Elizabeth Thunder Bird Haile, a tribe elder, fellowship founder and the film's co-producer, said "Native

American Neighbors" was originally meant to be distributed by the United Methodist Church for parish screenings on Native American Awareness Sunday, held around Easter. Beyond that, Ms. Haile said, she hoped it would document how the fellowship "is doing great things with minimal resources and a lot of love."

"We didn't have great ambitions for it, so having it shown at the film festival was a wonderful surprise," she said.

The festival will also feature "Is the Crown at War With Us?" This is a feature-length documentary, directed by Alanis Obomsawin. It outlines the at times violent conflict between the native Mi'gmaq fishermen of New Brunswick and their neighbors.

The two films about Native Americans were selected by Alli Hunter Joseph, 31, a documentary filmmaker, journalist and Shinnecock. She said she chose them because each "seemed to fit in a very relevant way to the broader discussion of native people's fight for sovereignty," but did so while emphasizing tribal history.

Like the Shinnecoaks, the Mi'gmaq have been involved in legal battles as they seek to fish unfettered by government regulations.

The festival, founded 11 years ago primarily as an outlet for independent American films, has increasingly attracted stars and directors and increasingly achieved an international

For the first time, a Shinnecock film is in the festival.

flavor. For the first time this year, it will hold an international forum for filmmakers, film companies and distributors from around the world.

The festival opens with the East Coast premiere of Wayne Kramer's film "The Cooler," starring William H. Macy, Maria Bello and Alec Baldwin. It closes on Oct. 26 with Robert Benton's "Human Stain," starring Anthony Hopkins, Nicole Kidman and Gary Sinise.

Its most popular features continue, including its master classes, panel discussions, Golden Starfish awards and the "Conflict and Resolution" series of films on war and civil strife. This year, that series has been selected by Maria-Christina Villaseñor, the film curator at the Guggenheim Museum.

"Native American Neighbors," which was co-produced by Karola Ritter, a filmmaker from Sag Harbor, is narrated in large part by Ms. Haile and her daughter, the Rev. Holly Haile-Davis, the pastor of Presbyterian congregations in Remsenburg

and East Moriches.

In the film, as the camera pans over the ocean dunes and some of the Hamptons' iconographic mansions, Ms. Haile-Davis alludes to the dichotomy of being poor in the shadow of such opulence.

"In a community that is surrounded by such wealth, we felt that surely would be successful," she said of the fellowship's mission.

The two films about Native Americans will be shown on Oct. 26 at the John Drew Theater at Guild Hall in East Hampton, after a Shinnecock tribal ceremony and dance performance.

Production on "Native American Neighbors" began last year, before the casino debate reached full flame, Ms. Joseph said.

"I don't think there's a core message to gaming because that's not what the film is about," she said. "It's about the need to take care of each other, which speaks to the larger issues of sovereignty and self-sufficiency. But I guess people will find their own meaning."

The Hamptons International Film Festival will run from Wednesday through next Sunday. Film showings and other events are in East Hampton, Sag Harbor, Southampton and Westhampton Beach. Information: www.hamptonsfilmfest.org (631) 324-4600.