

LOCAL

## Ithaca shaman makes house call at Colgate University

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Bringing in a shaman is not your usual response when things are not going well at a NCAA Division I athletic program.

But that's just what Colgate University did.

Colgate Associate Director of Athletics Jeffrey Falardeau, who described the school as having an open mind, said he thought Ithaca shaman Susan Norton would be the right person to make things better. He knew Norton from his time as an assistant athletic director at Ithaca College.

Falardeau said Colgate had a rough patch with both injuries and performance in the fall. So after talking with Colgate Director of Athletics Victoria Chun at the end of the year, Falardeau said he thought about how to bring in some positive energy and cleanse the negative energy.

### **Shaman defined**

Norton describes a shaman as "someone who works in sacred space with the help of spirits to create great shifts in people and in places."

Shamans can work powerful changes on people, animals or spaces, she said.

Norton describes herself as jumping in with both feet when she started to learn about being a shaman in 2008. She has trained in Peru, Canada and the United States.

Norton worked as a Spanish teacher, mostly at the middle school level in New York City, and upstate communities such as Honeoye, Wayland and Candor before she left teaching in 2010 to make a career as a shaman. She also has worked in theater as a writer and director.

### **Blessing a room**

Norton recently used her shaman skills in the Town of Ulysses home of photographer Elaine Derby to bless her living room.

She set up a small altar on the dining room table, with objects to represent the four directions — a serpent for the south, a jaguar for the west, a hummingbird for the north, and an eagle/condor for the east. Other items on the altar included a rose quartz crystal, a necklace encircling two metal figures of the sacred masculine and the feminine, and two lighted candles. She set up a bowl of ammonia and put it low in the room, on a sacred cloth to pull in any traces of heavy energy.

Norton placed a large crystal on stairs of the home above the room. She described this as a place for larger entities to go if her work made them want to leave.

Then, she took a mouthful of Murray & Lanman Florida Water, a cologne, spritzed it into the air, called to the four directions and opened the sacred space.

Norton burned sage in a abalone shell and walked counterclockwise around the room spreading the smoke with a large feather.

Then she walked around the room again, waving red carnations and dipping them repeatedly in a bowl of water mixed with essential oils. The flowers absorb heavy energy, she explained.

Norton exclaimed that the red carnations were working well when two of the flowers' heads fell off; she said the heads had absorbed energy. She carefully picked them up and set them outside the front door to be taken away later and released into a waterfall or other moving water.

The entire procedure took about an hour before Norton closed the sacred space. Derby wiped up splashes of the water from the carnations.

### **Appealing practice**

Andrei Znamenski, an assistant professor of history at the University of Memphis and the author of "The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination," describes the attraction of these old traditions.

Znamenski sees shamanism, starting in the 1960s, as a turning away from traditional religion. He describes the attraction of shamanism as similar to that of Tibetan Buddhism, but with the difference that there is not standard prescription of what you have to do.

"It appeals to western people, especially Americans, because Americans are individualists compared to my former compatriots, Russians," Znamenski said.

### **Colgate athletics**

Falardeau, of Hamilton, New York, described the process at Colgate as something that was acceptable to everyone. Norton blessed all seven of the major athletics facilities in December.

Since then, he describes fewer injuries and great season in men's basketball. The basketball facility was identified by Norton as having a greater amount of negative energy.

"All in all, we've had a very positive and productive winter," Falardeau said.

"Susan's very very prepared. I've a tremendous amount of respect for people who take their job very seriously and are very passionate about it, and can definitely tell with Susan that she's very passionate about what she does."

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### **For more information**

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