

# WELCOME TO A POWWOW

(Materials used with permission from the Muskegon Powwow)



Your presence in this celebration of our heritage honors us. We hope that you will gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the North American Native cultures and visions so that we may gain renewed respect for one another. We ask our guests to be attentive to special observances during the Powwow and to join in our respect for our traditions and spiritual beliefs. This program was written to explain the meanings of our ways and seek to further develop mutual understanding of our cultures.

The Powwow has an historical, spiritual, and social value to the North American Native people. In addition to participating in the traditional dances and songs, the Native people can visit with family and friends, make new acquaintances, and trade their arts and crafts. The Powwow has also become a means of sharing cultural information with non-Natives.

During the Powwow, both the young, who are just beginning their journey through life, and the elders, who are nearing completion of their journey, share closeness to the Creator. It is during the Powwow that the spirit of the North American Native is renewed.

## THE DRUM

Songs play a vital role in North American Native culture, not only for entertainment, but also for religious purposes. The songs

you hear at a Powwow are part of an oral tradition and are learned by the singers through an apprenticeship. The songs and the Drum should be approached with proper cultural courtesies. The Drum should be considered the same as a sacred bundle and must be treated with respect and not handled unless its purpose is understood. Songs are treated in the same way. Some songs can be sung only under special circumstances. Others are not sung at all because of their power. The singers collectively called the Drum, direct the dancers and radiate the spirit from the Sacred Circle's center.

## POWWOW ETIQUETTE

Powwows are sacred events steeped in tradition. This sacredness will be explained later. However, to help you understand the traditional etiquette and thus be able to better participate and enjoy we offer the following basic list of do's and don't's.

When the Eagle Staff is brought into the ring during the Grand Entry (in company with the American Flag) or taken from the ring, it is respectful to stand and remove your hat.

The same respect should be shown should an eagle feather fall to the ground. If you should discover a fallen eagle feather, please do not pick it up. Rather guard it and notify a Powwow official. There are

ceremonies for the returning of a fallen eagle feather.

Pointing with a finger, particularly with the index finger, is considered impolite. The traditional method is to indicate the direction by pursing the lips and pointing with the eyes or with a nod of the head.

#### **DO NOT TOUCH ANY REGALIA.**

Ornaments have special meanings and many of the hand-crafted outfits, which can cost hundreds of dollars, are cherished for having been made in part or on whole by a particularly respected family member. Frequently, they are heirlooms and may be delicate. Of course, the feathers have a special sacredness.

Random walking, running, or playing in the Dance arena after it has been blessed at the beginning of the weekend is strictly prohibited.

Taping of songs is allowed only by permission of the Head Singer of the drum. Even if permission has been granted, the Master of Ceremonies may request specific songs not be recorded at the Drum's request.

Any photograph of an individual taken outside the ring should be with the expressed permission of that person. Obtaining an individual's permission shows respect for that person's dignity and rights of privacy. Some ceremonies or events, such as a dropped eagle feather and its recovery, may not be photographed. The MC will help guide you on this.

No alcoholic beverages or drugs are allowed at the Powwow. Violators will be removed from the grounds.

Visitors are welcomed to enter the dance arena during the inter-tribals or by invitation during special songs (e.g. Veteran dances, blanket dances, honor dances). All other times please respect the sacredness of the ring by not entering it.

Seats within the dance arena are for the dancers. Participation in a special dance does not qualify a spectator for a seat inside the dance area. Many times seats will be reserved, or identified as being used by a person, by being covered with a blanket. Please respect this dancer's claim.

Although much respect is given to the 4-legged, dogs are not permitted in the dance arena area.

Above all else, enjoy yourself, ask questions, and get to know the dancers, singers and vendors. Just like on St. Patrick's Day - everyone's Irish - feel at home when attending a Powwow. Swing and dance the Anishinaabe way.



#### **POWWOW PREPARATION**

Hosting a Powwow means many hours of fund-raising and group effort. Most communities consider it very important to

host visitors to the best of their ability. This can mean anything from providing meals and comfortable camping accommodations to giving participants gas money. Generally, providing a friendly atmosphere for guests is an important value to Native People and is a reflection of the generosity and good will of the sponsoring community. Visitors leaving with good feelings will return again for the gathering.

An important duty prior to the gathering is purification of the event grounds. This is to help ensure that only good thought and feelings will occur there, and that everyone will have a good time. Once the ground is blessed, it is considered sacred, and everyone is asked to keep it as clean as possible. This is why drugs and alcohol are not allowed at the event. Some dances also hold sunrise ceremonies each day of the Powwow so participants (or anyone who wishes to attend) may offer their morning prayers.

### **TYPES OF POWWOWS**

Generally, there are two types of powwows common in the Great Lakes area, the traditional powwow and the contest or competition powwow.

The contest powwow features competition in several dance and age categories. Judging to determine winners may also occur for other activities such as drum groups, solo singers, and even vendor set-ups. Judges carefully keep track of points through out the weekend looking at, style, ability to keep time to the music, knowledge of songs and dances, regalia, and very importantly, stopping on the last beat

of the song and not losing any part of their regalia.

Drum contests may be conducted during the regular rotation of Drums during the weekend dances or there may be special sessions for solo or group hand drum singers.

Traditional powwows usually do not contain any contests, although there may be some judging of crafts or other casual sideline competitions. These powwows tend to offer more variety of dances for dancers and visitors, as time is not used for contests and dance-offs. Traditional powwows still may also include "fun" contests such as a two-step contest, best crow hopper, fastest snagger, best Indian-car, or other humorous events. Some communities who host traditional powwows choose to offer all the dancers and singers a small honorarium to assist with the travel expenses in lieu of contest prizes.

Traditional powwows have also given rise to spiritual or elder conferences held in conjunction with the event. These gatherings give community members and visitors the opportunity to listen and learn from the elders. It is sometimes an opportunity for naming ceremonies, weddings, dance initiations, and other ceremonies that might not easily be held away from the Native community. While not every community sponsors such conferences, they are becoming more common.

### **THE DANCES**

North American Native dances are an expression of thankfulness to the Creator,

as the people dance around the drums in the Sacred Circle, which represents the cycle of life. Dancing is done in community spirit. It is traditionally a time when friends and relatives come together to celebrate with each other. Over the years, the dances have changed to reflect the growth of traditions. Today, a Powwow begins by the blessing of the grounds, the Grand Entry, and the Flag Song. The Grand Entry is the first dance event of the Powwow. The dancers enter the arena and create the Sacred Circle. Participants signal the Grandfathers and Grandmothers (the sacred ancestors) to witness this event. As the dancers proceed they reaffirm the strength of traditional values.

To the Native people, the Flag Song holds the same regard, as does the National Anthem to non-Natives.

All people are asked to stand and remove their hats as a sign of respect for the Veterans who have served their country. The Head Veteran Dancer leads the dancers during the Flag Song. During the victory song, the people dance behind the Head Veteran Dancer in respect for the veterans, elders, and the flags of the American and Native nations.

Other dances performed during the weekend include intertribal dances, memorial dances, and specialty dances. The intertribal dances provide an opportunity for both Native dancers and the visiting public to dance in the arena. Some Powwows are arranged to conduct contests among the dancers and singers;

while other Powwows are designed for fun and fellowship and are regarded as traditional Powwows, not a competition Powwow.



## WOMEN'S DANCE STYLES

**Women's Traditional** - This may be another review of women's rights. As noted earlier, powwow style of dancing began as an outgrowth of a men's club. But someone had to cook for these important functions. After many years some of these cooks began to wander over to view the proceedings, then to bounce in time along side the dance arena. Finally some brave souls began to dance inside. Whether dancing in place or moving around the circle, these women are among the most beautiful and cherished in the world. Dance clothes vary depending on whether the dancer has chosen to wear a style from the Northern or Southern Plains or are fortunate enough to be able to draw from local family traditions. A shawl is always carried or worn.

**Women's Jingle Dress** - This dance was developed right here in the Great Lakes region by the Ojibwa people, and has spread across North America. Originally this dance was developed as a result of a vision which described the dance and clothes to be used in a successful healing ritual. Today the dancers will often be asked to dance as a prayer for a friend or family member. The distinctive dress often is decorated with 365 cones, although this number may vary. The dancer

has traditionally responded to a dream or vision that calls her to become a jingle dress dancer. Each day for a year she rolls one cone and offers a prayer. This woman's style does not use a shawl. The use of the fan is significant in that it is employed to send up the special prayers to the Creator.

**Women's Fancy Shawl** - Gaining popularity in the 1960's, this dance style was the next step for women to enjoy the dance as much as the men. Here women can demonstrate their agility and use graceful spinning movements while keeping time to the drum. Brightly colored shawls are the highlight of this dance, with decorative knee length dresses and matching beaded accessories.

## MEN'S DANCE STYLES



**Men's Traditional** - The dance movements of the traditional dancer are developed from the heritage of warriors describing prior and future war exploits, or stories of hunting. Powwows, as we know them today, are the outgrowth of a warriors society where dancing played a major role. Traditional outfits may seeks to recapture popular styles drawn heavily from styles over a hundred years ago, or they might keep the flavor of the past but keep step with the trends of today using modern materials, fashions, and designs. This style is marked by the early "crow belt" or the single large flat circle bustle of the contemporary traditional dancer. Most of the outfits seen in this area show Northern Plain influences or keep the

traditional Western Great Lakes clothing styles. Other popular styles include Oklahoma straight dance, and Eastern Great Lakes (I roquois).

**Men's Grass Dance** - The Grass Dance is another dance style coming from an early men's warrior society. It is said that originally the warriors would wear braids of sweetgrass tucked in their belts to represent scalps taken in battle. Today these dancers wear fabric or yarn fringes. Most dancers will wear a roach with either tail feathers or the earlier style of wire antennae tipped with fluffs. Bustles are very rare. The dance style is smooth, swaying, and graceful. It is often said that the young male grass dancers would be available to dance the tall grasses down when a new camp area was selected.

**Men's Fancy Dance** - As an outgrowth of the touring "Wild West" shows of the late 1800's and early 1900's, the fancy dance style appeared to give the performances more show appeal. Here we see more spins, jumps, and flashy body movement. A basic guideline for traditional dancers to remember is to always have one foot on the ground. It seems that here the goal is to always have both feet off the ground! This style of clothing is marked by two colorful bustles (neck and hip) as well as bustles on the arms. The roach feathers are usually set on a rocker to help keep them moving.

## VENDORS

An attractive feature of most Powwows is the presence of vendors and their wide assortment of trade goods. Whether you are looking to buy items for the kids or

something that will become a treasured heirloom, it is likely you will find it here. Most of the vendors have sold at Powwows or similar events for some time. Many will stand behind their products, but it is still a sale from a person that will not be here next week so keep your receipts and get addresses. Many of the products range from items similar to inexpensive trinkets designed to be enjoyed for the day to delicately crafted items that will last for years with proper care. Prices may at times seem to be higher than you are used to seeing on the street for a similar item. In regards to this, ask if it is hand-made by an independent craftsman or part of a mass-produced assembly line imported program. CD's may have the same high quality as typical street products but are specialized and not produced in the same quantities to enable lower prices. Niche sale items tend to run higher. "Are all vendors Native Americans?" Not necessarily. Non-natives have long traded with the Native populations. The shopper always has the right to set their standards as to which stands they will patronize. Federal laws restrict the misrepresentation of products or the sale of those products.

Regalia is the proper term used in describing the clothing worn by men and women during special cultural events such as powwows. (photo by Glenn Lamberg Used with permission from Bucko Teeple, Sault Ste. Marie, MI)



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