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Traditional dances
Sherry Locklear and Ricky Chavis dance traditional Indian dances during September's Indian Heritage Week.

Students study Indian Heritage

By Ed Miller

Indians play a vital part in the development of Hoke County and efforts are being made through the Indian Education Act (IEA) to help all members of the community be aware of their contributions.

The more than 2,500 Indians living in Hoke County represent over 12% of the population, and include a significant number of taxpayers, employers and employees.

Indians may be in a minority of the population in Hoke County, but IEA workers believe they have major influence on much of society.

Indians occupied this country before anyone else.

Existing today, there are customs that began with the American Indian as well as national organizations for all races that are based on the customs and beliefs of different tribes of Indians.

Despite the good the race has given to the nation's culture, most

American Indians occupy the lower rungs of the social and economic ladder.

Years of relocation, unemployment and non-acceptance have hurt the advancement of Indians, but now efforts are underway to help restore what society helped take away.

Through the IEA program, Hoke County Indians are learning again to have pride in their heritage.

"The program is designed to address the cultural and academic needs of students," said Mitchell Tyler, Hoke County IEA Director.

During the same week as the North Carolina Turkey Festival, schools in the county and others celebrated Indian Heritage Week.

The effort was coordinated by Tyler.

Every Hoke elementary school classroom participated in a door decorating contest as well as some classes at Upchurch Jr. High and Hoke High.

The theme was simple. Make a door decoration that communicates a message about the Indian people, make it original, be creative and involve as many students as possible.

Also during the week, movies were shown on the advancement of Indians and, on Friday of the week, students were allowed to wear native Indian dress.

The goal of the week and of the IEA program in general is to "pull people together to work for the kids of this county," said Tyler.

The job is not simple. For that reason, steps must be taken to "educate" the entire Indian population.

"Some parents don't see the value of education," Tyler said, adding that if an education is not important to parents, children will also show little interest.

"The object of these efforts is not to form a club or a small group, but to form a group of parents that are willing to go to bat

for these kids," Tyler said.

For that reason, on November 2, an activity day is being planned for South Hoke School.

Not only children, but parents especially are invited to take part in the day.

There will be free fried chicken and all the activities that could be wanted including horseshoes, volleyball, basketball, softball, quilting and a bake sale.

Various groups will also perform for the crowd.

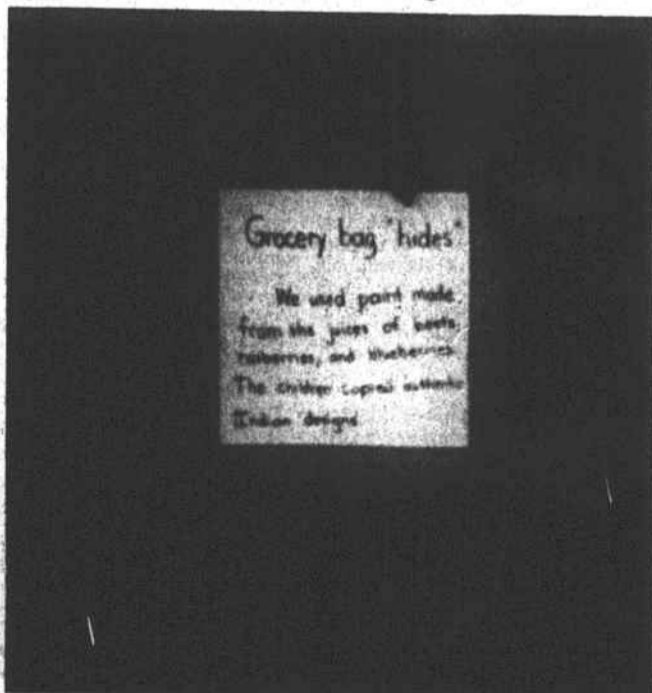
Hopefully, the day will open the door for better communications, said Tyler.

"So many times, we react to a problem. We should act before the problem.

Action needs to be taken to change the way some Indians perceive themselves, he said.

"If we can get them to stick their necks out...like the a turtle out of a shell," said Tyler.

That is what the Indian Education Act is all about.



Original
This was one of the more original door decorations. Students cut paper bags to the shape of animal hides. Students even made paints from berries and colored vegetables.



Nice job
The dress, bow and beads, are just one classroom's effort to decorate for Indian Heritage Week.