

# Celebrations of Culture Enr

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The early morning sun gazes down at the parking lot quickly filling with autos from across the country. There is an undercurrent of excitement as traders begin to unload their wares onto the display tables. Copper and turquoise jewelry flash on one table, boxes of soft, leather mocassins hide beneath another, waiting to be bought. Inside the change rooms, dancers garb themselves in traditional regalia in preparation for the opening ceremony. It is February, and the annual Powwow is here.

What is the significance of this annual event? In the words of Dana Long of the copy center, "The Powwow is a chance for people to come in good spirits, to reunite, to catch up, and to learn from those around you."

For months, news of our Powwow has been spreading throughout the Indian community, both of North Carolina and of others parts of the country. Native Americans from various tribes including the Lumbee, Cherokee, and Haliwa-Saponi will come to dance traditional Indian dances, sing the songs of the drum, and meet friends whom they have not seen in years.

"It is a grand reunion of friends. You never know who will show up", says Joe Liles, an art instructor at NCSSM.

The Powwow was begun four years ago, the brainchild of Native American students at NCSSM. "The intention was to let all Indian cultures in North Carolina know we're here, that their children are welcome, and they will find support at NCSSM. We hope to up Native American applicants", says Ms. Long.

Rhiannon Giddens, a senior who is part Native American, says, "I feel like this year, the spirits are

good. People I've talked to are really excited. This year, knowing that I would be able to sing and dance in the Powwow has helped me through. Although it's been a tough year, the Powwow has given me something to look forward to."

The organization of the Powwow is no small feat. It involves careful planning, the inviting of special Indian people to make it run smoothly, and good spirit from all involved to

The chosen people of whom Ms. Long speaks include the Master of Ceremonies, the Head Man Dancer, the Head Lady Dancer, and the Host Drum. The Master of Ceremonies (abbreviated M.C.) is responsible for seeing that the Powwow keeps going. He announces the Grand Entry, welcomes the dancers into the arena, and announces people of honor as they enter the circle. This year's M.C. will be Eddie Benton-Banai of the Lac Courte Orielles Reservation in Wisconsin. Mr.

Indian Alex Ross, who is currently in the tenth grade. Ninth grader Sallie Jacobs, also Lumbee, will be the Head Lady Dancer.

Before the Powwow begins, the dance arena is blessed by an elder, and it becomes a sacred place that no one enters unless they dance or sing. The host drum, which will this year be made up in part by past NCSSM alumni, starts the Powwow with the Grand Entry song. All the dancers are led in by the Color Guard holding the Indian Flag, the American Flag, and the Powwow, and stand in place while the host drum plays the Flag Song. A prayer is then delivered in a native language, followed by the Veterans' Song. After this Grand Entry, the day is spent listening to the pounding of the drums, watching the intricate dances and the display of ornate regalia, and trying to resist the urge to buy everything that the traders have to offer.

The Powwow is a very meaningful part of the Indian culture. To Lane Wright, SLI, the experience is highly spiritual. "A step into the circle is like being one with all people in it, with the Savior, like being a prayer. Your spirit and body become one in worship of the creator." Lane says that every motion and every word is symbolic to the native people. Even the dance steps symbolize "how First Man tested the ground when he first stepped on earth."

Ms. Long agrees. "When you go into the circle, you're entering a sacred area. I think the feeling that you get is love. This is something that people are sharing as the Creator intended for people to share love."

Joe Liles, who sponsors Akwe:kon along with Ms. Long, feels that the Powwow "can be magical. When the spirit is just right, it's like you are transported to another time and place." Mr. Liles assured me that he was not

## Join the Sacred Circle



Dancers spend years making regalia, adding to it each year, so that the Powwow can become quite a show of colorful feathers and jingling fringe.

ensure that all sacred traditions are upheld and that all feel welcomed.

Ms. Long says that, "It is (our) responsibility to put forth an effort to choose people (to run the Powwow) who are walking The Red Road - who attempt to understand their response, to behave in an appropriate way. An elder once said 'My grandmother taught me that every step, every breath, every word is a prayer.' It can't be about ego or showboating. You have to come together in good hearts."

Benton is a priest and medicine man of the Ojibway tribe.

The Head Man Dancer and the Head Lady Dancer are responsible for leading all the dances. When they step into the circle and move past the dancers waiting along the sides, the dancers can step into the circle. The Head Man and Lady Dancers this year are special because they are both teenagers, and the NCSSM Powwow will be their first official responsibility. The Head Man Dancer is Lumbee