

Ceremony strengthens confederacy

By Anne Jarvis
Expositor Staff

MISSISSAUGA — An historic confederacy of three nations of Indians from across North America, weakened since contact with Europeans more than two centuries ago, was resurrected in a modest ceremony Friday.

The Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibway, including the Mississaugas of the New Credit Reserve, extends from Wisconsin to Manitoba and Ontario. The alliance has remained active, gathering for seasonal ceremonies, but living its way of life is difficult under pressure to assimilate.

So about 75 of its people, most from New Credit, renewed their commitment to it by lighting three fires in Saddington Park next to Lake Ontario. It was an appropriate location — the site of a village of Mississaugas before 1847 and part of land the band now claims.

"This is a great park we have here," Chief Fred King of New Credit joked.

The heart

The fire is considered the heart of the nation. The kindlings were arranged in a triangle representing the three nations; the bodies, minds

Three nations of Indians renew their commitment

and spirits of their people; and their past, present and future.

Water, the blood of the earth, was poured around the fires and a ring of cedar, a medicine, surrounded them to protect them.

The first fire was lit amid a prayer thanking the Creator for life and asking for the ability to use what He taught them to solve their problems and preserve a future for their children.

The flames from the first fire were used to start the others and when the prayer ended, tobacco was sprinkled on the flames, its smoke believed to carry the people's thoughts to the Creator.

The confederacy's flag, a picture of three fires on four stripes of color representing the four races, was displayed by two native children.

Principles

Jim Dumont, the Keeper of the Drum, the heartbeat of the nation, at the Eastern Doorway of the confederacy, near St. Charles, offered "a spiritual message of understanding; of peace, of how we can walk

together on this earth. If you can hear that message," Mr. Dumont said, "we can be assured our children have a future."

The confederacy must study the past, its traditional way of life, if it is to be able to revive itself in the present, he said later. But that does not mean "living in teepees and travelling by foot or canoe. It means taking the principles of that life and bringing them into this life — living a good life, dealing with problems like alcohol. It's our ability to be a people again."

The Ojibway prophesied this resurrection, Mr. Dumont said. Native life would deteriorate, according to the prophesy, until it is on the verge of extinction.

"At the last moment, when we are about to lose everything, there is regeneration," Mr. Dumont said.

The smouldering kindlings were placed in a large pot in the back of a truck to be taken to New Credit, where they will burn during the Three Fires Homecoming Powwow today and Sunday.

To get to the powwow, the first one to be held at New Credit, take Cockshutt Road to Sour Spring Road and continue to Onondaga Road. Turn right and the band's community complex is on the left.

The events will be on a baseball diamond in front of the old council building and in a clearing behind the building.

Dancing was scheduled for 1 p.m. today and continues this evening and Sunday.

The Mayor of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion, attended the ceremony wearing a bead necklace Chief King gave her.

"We are proud of our name. We are proud of our relationship to you," the mayor told the people. "We should have a conscience about how Indian people, the original settlers of this land, are treated."

AUG 1987