

**OHSWEKEN** — Native voices sang in native languages while native feet danced in moccasins decorated with fur, beads and bells to the beat of a drum, the heart of every Indian.

Indians from various nations across North America gathered at Chiefswood Park during the weekend for the Grand River Champion of Champions Powwow, a traditional cultural event that is also a modern commercial success.

Evelyn Bomberry, the powwow's organizer, said today that about

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## Stories by Anne Jarvis Photos by Brian Thompson Expositor Staff

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15,000 people were at the event which featured 200 dancers.

"It was definitely a success," she said. "It was one of the better powwows in recent years."

The atmosphere was infectious. Some of the spectators — from the Six Nations Reserve, surrounding communities and the rest of the world — endured the heat, applauded the dancers, posed for photographs with them and tried a few steps.

"Emphasize that it's not yelling and screaming," said Brian Lyons of the Thunder Bay Singers, mopping perspiration from his face between songs.

Any number of people can participate in a singing group as long as they are men. Women are not allowed to beat the drum. That's the way it is, said Mr. Lyons, a 32-year-old Ojibway originally from the Manitowishwaning Reserve, near Fort Francis.

One of the singers — in this case Mr. Lyons, who teaches native singing and dancing at Lakehead University — chooses the songs and another ensures the beat is correct.

### Tell stories

Eight beats are played on the drum, which is rawhide heated and stretched over a wood frame. The Thunder Bay singers left their real drum at home and used a regular drum often seen in parades. The music is distinguished by different beats and combinations of beats.

The songs have verses and choruses, all sung in native languages. They tell stories about life and are performed for certain occasions, from courtship to hunting. All have been passed from generation to generation, but there are no sheets of music.

Women are allowed to sing only the last half of a verse.

"A good singer is a singer who knows all types of songs for different occasions," Mr. Lyons said. "It's not whether you have a high clear voice or a loud voice. It's the expressive quality."

His father, Richard Lyons, 63, eight-year-old son Nathan and 10-year-old daughter Fawn travelled with him to dance.

The patriarch, his grey hair tied in two braids, has been dancing for 40 years. "You just grow up watching. It comes naturally," he said.

There are two types of dancing, traditional and fancy. Traditional dances are those for ceremonies. Fancy dances use the same basic step and add other recognized but not traditional steps. Each dancer uses imagination to combine the steps. Although fancy dancers require more strength, agility and endurance, rhythm is the most important aspect of any dance.

### Hide sash

"Watch how they move their bodies and legs," said Brian Lyons. "If they're in time with the drum — that's how to tell a good dancer."

The costumes are a popular part of the powwow. "The costumes are so colorful," said Laura Hawkins, of Markham. "It's marvelous. I've never seen anything like this."

Richard Lyons' costume started with the roach, which is worn on the head, and a crown of long hairs from a porcupine, short hairs from a deer and eagle feathers.

Draped across his chest was a sash of steer hide. A trade cloth, also called a breach cloth, hung from his waist. The original name dates from when Indians obtained the cloth by trading with Europeans. A bustle of eagle feathers protruded from his back. Underneath was a normal shirt and pair of shorts.

A string of bells hung down each leg and wrapped around each ankle. They jingled in time with the drum when he danced.

Other accessories included a choker, or necklace, of animal bones and colored beads around his neck, a silver bracelet around his arm and leather bands with deer hide fringes around his calves.

His moccasins, made of elk hide, were decorated with a fringe of goat hair and colored beads.

The costume is not what every Ojibway wears. It represents different nations. Richard Lyons has travelled to different reserves in North America and other dancers have presented various parts of the costume to him, such as the sash from the Sioux of South Dakota.

"I didn't ask about them. I just accepted them," he said.