

# Native arts festival a fine attraction

OHSWEKEN — Last week I attended the International Festival of Native Arts at Exhibition Place in Toronto. It was a fundraising program for the Native American Center for the Living Arts in Niagara Falls, N.Y. This institute is called The Turtle because the building, which is near the Rainbow Bridge, is in the shape of a huge turtle. In Iroquoian culture, North America was referred to as Turtle Island.

Duffy Wilson, the executive director of The Turtle, did a tremendous job in co-ordinating many activities during the nine days the festival in Toronto lasted. I went on a Thursday evening and in addition to visiting many arts and crafts booths, I saw a couple of interesting performances by native groups.

The first group was already performing when I arrived. They were not wearing buckskin or feathers because they were Metis people from the northern prairies. Descendants of Plains Indians and French trappers, they were step-dancing energetically to a fiddle and a guitar. Their dark hair and eyes plainly showed that native blood flowed in their veins. The men looked handsome and smart with colorful sashes hanging from their waists. The girls were pretty in wide-skirted dresses.

## Our Town

George  
Beaver



The second performance was by a Zuni Indian group from New Mexico. The Zunis lived in pueblos before the white men arrived. Some of their centuries old, flat-topped buildings still stand in the southwest U.S. They were peaceful people who grew corn and other vegetables in their irrigated fields.

A bad public address system made it difficult to understand what the announcer was saying. However, the dances and native regalia were all beautiful. The Zunis and other southwest natives dance straight up and down. They do not bend forward and backward or twist and turn as much as woodland Indian dancers do. Even their eagle dance and buffalo dance was stately and graceful, rather than energetic.

The range of arts and crafts for sale was quite extensive. I had not even seen some of the South American native techniques before. From Peru, Inca Indians had brought gourds on which dozens of small figures had been painstakingly drawn. The tiny figures completely covered all sides. In another technique, bits of colored cloth were used to make bright, three-dimensional wall hangings.

In three hours I was unable to get to all of the displays. It is supposed to become an annual event, so maybe next year I'll get to see them all. Some of the silver and turquoise rings from Central and South America seemed to be real bargains.

I like to attend events such as this. I have found that Indians from other countries often have the same problems, dreams and desires as those right here in Ontario. Whether they are from Alaska, Guatemala, Mexico or Peru, the indigenous people of these two continents who are now called Indians have a lot of things in common.