

OHSWEKEN — Chiefswood Park comes alive this weekend with the swirling of feathers and bells to the beat and singing of traditional native dancing.

The Champion of Champions Powwow — one of Ontario's largest powwows — begins Saturday with more than 300 dancers and six or seven groups of singers and drummers — called drums — expected to compete for \$24,000 in prize money.

Powwows are traditional dance competitions that attract dancers from all over North America travelling on a dance circuit competing for prize money that can range as high as \$40,000.

Dancers compete in various categories: men have the traditional, fancy and grass dancing while women compete in the traditional, fancy shawl and jingle dancing.

This year, the honor of being the Host Drum is going to the Smokey Town drum from Wisconsin. The term 'drum' includes the drum as well as the singers who make up the group.

Bomberry said that the host drum performs all the lead singing and the honor songs.

This year's head female dancer — the woman who symbolizes a good dancer and person as well as someone who knows her culture — will be a woman from Sarnia.

The head male dancer hasn't been chosen.

Dancing isn't the only attraction.

More than 130 native craft vendors and 30 food sellers will be at the powwow.

The Moving Wall, the portable Vietnam veteran's memorial, is also at the park until Sunday.

Powwow a big hit

"I like to see all the different crafts and the different native cultures," said Darling, who has been making and selling dream catchers and native jewelry for as long as she's been attending powwows.

"The bead work talks about the culture, it's like a language of its own."

"I've been carving ever since I was a little boy," said Chrisjohn.

"I make traditional art but use my own designs."

Chrisjohn carves bone and antler and makes silver and turquoise jewelry. Some of his larger works, such as a sculpture carved from a single moose antler, cost upwards of \$6,500.

"A lot of work goes into one of those pieces," said Chrisjohn who spends over 120 hours carving and painting such pieces.