

Powwow Tradition

The Mohawk man believes the powwow is a modern-day version of traditional trading festivals, where Iroquois nations and their allies traded goods, held political discussions and joined in inter-tribal dancing.

Art Solomon, an Ojibwa elder and author who lives near Sudbury, said his people did have a traditional summer festival.

The Ojibwas split up into small groups through the winter to find food and trap for furs. When summer arrived the families would drift back to the community "and then there was a need for celebration."

Jake Thomas, a traditional Cayuga chief who has taught native studies at Trent University for 14 years, says the powwow was borrowed from the Plains Indians, who used to have ceremonies involving dancing in preparation for hunting expeditions, warfare and other important events.

The Iroquois ceremonies, held throughout the year to give thanks to the earth and the Creator, cannot be incorporated into the powwows, he said.

"The elders were always against some things in the powwow because there was so much competition," and it was all for money.

Traditional longhouse beliefs stress that singing and dancing are gifts from the Creator and they should be used for the benefit of the community rather than for personal gain.

Some bands, such as the Mississaugas of the New Credit, have decided against the big-budget, competitive powwows in favor of smaller, more traditional gatherings.

Dancing is only a small part of the two-day event. In the mornings there are teaching circles and ceremonies for the native people.

In the evenings, speakers discuss issues which will help everyone learn more about the Ojibwa culture.

The band also hosts a big feast, as a "thank you" to all who attend. Gas money is provided to help offset travel costs of participants.



Expositor Photo
A native dancer competes in the 1990 Grand River Champion of Champions Powwow. The annual powwow will be held this weekend at Chiefswood Park.